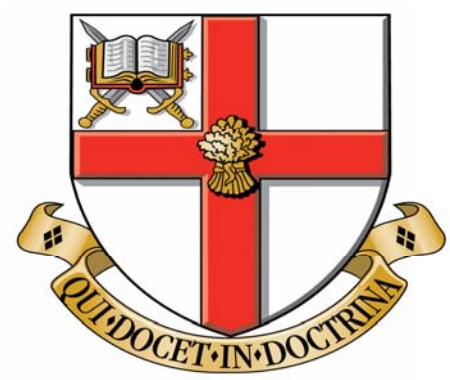

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Author(s): Emily Pennington

Title: Touching the future: A feminist theology of eschatalogical bodies

Date: August 2014

Originally published as: University of Chester PhD thesis

Example citation: Pennington, E. (2014). *Touching the future: A feminist theology of eschatalogical bodies*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Chester, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10034/347004

# Touching the Future: a Feminist Theology of Eschatological Bodies

**Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**by Emily Pennington**

**August 2014**

## Declaration

I declare that the material presented for examination here is my own work and has not been submitted for an award at this or another Higher Education institution.

Parts of this thesis appear in significantly condensed forms in the following publications:

Pennington, E. (2013). Does Feminism Need the Future? Rethinking Eschatology for Feminist Theology. *Feminist Theology, 21*(3), 220-231.

Pennington, E. (forthcoming). Touching the Future: A Living Eschatology. *International Journal of Public Theology*.

**Contents**

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my thanks to the Bible Society and the University of Chester for their generous decisions to help fund this thesis. Without them it would not have been possible, and I am extremely appreciative of their help and support.

Many thanks also to the University of Chester's Theology and Religious Studies Department. I feel incredibly fortunate to have been part of such an inspiring and encouraging department, and have always felt nurtured there. I am especially grateful for my principal supervisor, Dr Hannah Bacon, who waded through countless (often nonsensical!) drafts of my thesis and managed somehow to get my point. Her understanding, support, humour, inspiration, patience, and faith in me have helped me to grow not only as a researcher but also as a person. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr Andrew Dawson (now of Lancaster University) for supporting my first steps into undergraduate study; Prof. Tom Greggs (now of the University of Aberdeen) for helping to kindle my passion for theology as an undergraduate and Master's student and for his comments on my early PhD work; Dr Wayne Morris for his kindness and advice, particularly with this thesis; and Dr Dawn Llewellyn for her enthusiasm, and for getting me talking to other Postgrads.

Amongst those, Anna Mackenzie and Kris Hiuser have been pure gems; this process would have been a much lonelier one without their empathy, insight, and company in the pub! I am also grateful for the friendships of Joy Henry, Alicja Gesicka, and Vale Gamberi. I would also like to thank others who have encouraged and helped to develop my theological voice along the way; in particular Prof. Lisa Isherwood, Dr Jenny Daggers, Miriam Leidinger, and Charity Hamilton along with other academics and Postgrads I have had the pleasure to engage with. My A-Level teachers Shaun McGeehan and, especially, Carmel Coughlan were integral to sparking my love for

theology, and I am grateful to them also. I am also thankful for the students I have had the privilege to teach, and for all that they, in turn, have taught me.

To my other, very dear friends, who have never been dismissive of my ramblings but who have gently coaxed me out of the hovel of my work: Leanne Barker, Mel Clarke, Berni Hunt, Heather Platt, and Kristin Reimers. Each one enriches my life with their kindness, humour, and experience. Special thanks to Matthew Swann for his constancy, honesty, and playful nature, all of which are invaluable gifts. To the friends who were with me at the start of this journey through the sometime labyrinth of theology, and who were integral to solidifying my love for it: Jennifer Horne, Amy Tunna, Kenny Nolan, Ste Patton, and Marcus Haddon. I have such fond memories of our beginnings and such pride in where they've taken us. A roll of thanks would, for me, be incomplete without relaying my thankfulness for all of my furry friends; in particular, I thank Pumpkin, Ralph, Jasp, Phoebe, and Meg for their unconditional cuddles and for accompanying me on many a pensive walk. My soul is nourished by each of you, as it is by all of my friends.

Thanks also to all of my family for providing perspective, fun, and care; in particular to Marty Johnson for the support and much appreciated cups of coffee. Special thanks to my Granddad, Wayne Cardell, for always showing an interest in my work and for giving me some incredible adventures; to my sister, Andie Pennington, for always walking by my side and for teaching me to have the courage never to settle for easy answers or options; and to my littlest brother, Oliver Johnson, for giving the best hugs, for asking me some of the most challenging and amusing questions, and for being his bright, entertaining, magical self.

Finally, to two women whose impact on me is immeasurable and for whom words of thanks seem so terribly insufficient. To my Nanna, Flo Platt, for teaching me so much about the joys and sorrows of life; she was my mentor, my ally, and my friend, and unknowingly inspired much of this thesis. Lastly, and most importantly, to my Mum, Wendy Johnson, who somehow manages to embody fortitude, compassion, integrity, and generosity with equal grace and humour. She has cultivated the roots that hold me close and the wings that set me free (see Wright Glenn, 2013, 44). I am entirely in awe of and deeply grateful to her.

**Touching the Future: A Feminist Theology of Eschatological Bodies**

**by Emily Pennington**

## Abstract

This thesis reclaims the eschatological future in light of and for feminist theology. It is mindful of critiques which expose the patriarchal, androcentric, and futuristic tendencies of traditional eschatological thought. Themes are detected amongst these critiques that pertain to the process, content, and time of eschatology: feminist theologians have proposed that traditional models of eschatology present the process as known and controlled by God alone; the content as fleshless and static; and the time as dislocated from present realities and concerns. Feminist theologians respond by attending to and affirming the complexities and significance of present embodiments. Three aspects of existence that are typically associated with women emerge as integral to this pursuit; namely embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality. I detect in these responses both potentials and problems. Reclaiming aspects of existence that have been excluded from and therefore devalued by eschatology, specifically because of their association with women, is affirmed as a necessary and important contribution. However, I note that the overwhelming (if understandable) reluctance amongst feminist theologians to speak of eschatological finality, or to grasp at specificity about the future, prevents us from hoping for fulfilled experiences of these aspects, and robs all of creation of a usable and hopeful future. The eschatological future is ultimately left in the hands of patriarchy. I attempt, therefore, to reconstruct the process, content, and time of eschatology in such a way that it not only affirms embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality, but also offers new and beneficial ways to think about these values. My thesis is thus firmly rooted in present feminist perspectives on, and some women's experiences of, embodiment. What is more, it converses with these by negotiating some ways in which a reconstructed eschatology can be open to and

changed by our present existences, even as it is able to inform and direct them. My ultimate goal is to uncover in the eschatological future a way in which to take and transform patriarchal constructions of female bodies in order to uncover a real and present hope for all bodies.

## Introduction

Christian constructions of the eschatological future are both worthy and in need of attention.[1] They are worthy as they quest after and seek to discover "the ultimate end of humanity and of creation" (Karras, 2006, 243). In contemplating such ultimacy, eschatological assertions make claims about God's intended "end" for creation. Considerations of this "end" have meandered around various landmarks, such as hermeneutical perceptions of the full and final reign of God, Platonic constructions of a spiritualised life, and the dialectical emphasis on the unknown "not yet" of eschatology (Phan, 2005, 174-5). On these and other landmarks, Christianity has tended to craft eschatology into an existence which is actualised by God, populated by spiritual bodies, and located primarily in the future. Such an eschatology is not only unsatisfactory but dangerous, for it lends itself to and upholds a theology of God which is patriarchal, a theology of creation which is androcentric, and a theology of hope which is forever delayed. The eschatological future thus needs attention as it has used its own constructions of male and female bodies to assign ultimate, divine worth to the former and inconsequence or iniquity to the latter.

Many feminist theologians have recognised this and have responded by constructing theologies which aim to centralise and contribute to the liberation of women's bodies from systemic, patriarchal oppression. In relation to eschatology, this has often meant affirming God's proximity to and involvement in relationships with fluid and sensual embodied beings, through which a better future may be realised in pragmatic and cooperative ways. The focus, though, overwhelmingly is on the present and, given the

[1] I refer here, and throughout my thesis, to the "eschatological future", rather than simply "eschatology", as many feminist theologians have offered reconstructions of eschatology in relation to the present. As will become clear, much less attention has been paid to rethinking futurist dimensions of eschatology, or its sense of finality and ultimacy, hence my choice of language and the originality of my contribution.

problems noted with traditional constructions of eschatology, this is understandable. Nevertheless, a predominantly presentist stance overlooks the chance for the values noted to be experienced in the fullness of intimacy and dynamism which are only partially experienced now. Moreover, the attempts to realise liberation are limited in both hope and scope, restricted as they are to that which is achievable in the here and now. Even feminist theologians who do appreciate a sense of eschatological futurity, such as Letty Russell and Rosemary Radford Ruether, are nevertheless cautious in specifying what such an existence may look like. Striving for such specificity can, however, be extremely beneficial: if based on feminist appreciations of embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality, eschatology can offer the ultimate affirmation of and hope for the full experience of these.

Still, bearing in mind Audre Lorde's cautionary statement that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984, 112), the tools of this trade must be carefully selected and mindfully used. M. Shawn Copeland, reading Letty Russell, claims that the master's house is actually "set against" God's house, and that this presents us with "two ends for our choosing" (1999, 39). Copeland continues by expounding Russell's call, explaining that the master's house signifies the "institutionalization of heterosexist white racist supremacy" whereas the household of God is comprised "of forgiveness and restoration, of gladness and festivity" (1999, 39). Thus, in the context of this thesis, I propose that we strive to discover the tools that feminist theologians have used to dismantle the master's eschatological house, in order to unearth ways in which we can contribute to the rebuilding of God's eschatological house. Indeed, it has been argued that such dismantling should serve the purposes of rebuilding: Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz explains that she "denounces and deconstructs" in order to "find" and "salvage" that which can help to "move ahead" (2004a, 342). In this way, I am sympathetic to the feminist theologians who seek to rebuild the house from

within in order that the house may become a home of liberation and not a prison of oppression.

That eschatology has so dutifully served patriarchal theology means that it is an appropriate place from which to start this task. At present, constructions of the eschatological future are largely unhelpful and damaging for feminist theology, thus they warrant not only critique but reconstruction. By attending to the ways in which feminist theologians have dismantled and rebuilt the foundations and features of traditional Christian models of eschatology, and using these to conceive of a new model, eschatology may emerge as an archetype of shifting loyalties: reflecting God's commitment to liberating creation in all of its particularity and diversity, rather than a patriarchally-defined eschatology which liberates only those associated with its androcentric values. This thesis does not, then, take the same approach as thinkers such as Susan Frank Parsons, Sarah Coakley, Valerie Karras, and Janet Martin Soskice. The details of these thinkers' approaches will be extrapolated momentarily therefore a summary is sufficient at this point. Parsons, Coakley, Karras and Soskice share a desire to re-read the tradition in order to recover valuable and beneficial elements in it; my own approach, for reasons that will be stated shortly, begins with feminist explorations and affirmations of female bodies in order to construct a new model of the eschaton.

## Eschatology and Embodiment

### Tools of Dismantling, Tools of Rebuilding

Many feminist theorists and theologians undertake similarly critical constructions by exposing the ways in which patriarchal thought has overlooked and denigrated female bodies. Speaking more widely of the unacknowledged biases of academic theory, Rosi Braidotti notes that the "knowing subject" has been deemed to be "universal, neutral, and consequently gender-free" (1993, 6). Debold, Tolman, and Mikel Brown support

this observation and note how Western culture "authorizes as knowledge the products of a mind abstracted from material reality – of the body, of human relationship, of the particulars of people's lives" (1996, 86). Feminist thinkers have addressed such systemic devaluations of female bodies by re-centering them, acknowledging that "The first and foremost of locations in one's reality is one's own embodiment" (Braidotti, 1993, 7). In relation to feminist theology this has meant recognising that "universality and impartiality are inadequate principles of moral reasoning" (Fiorenza, 1991, 103). Instead, the particularities and complexities of embodied lives and experiences are centralised as the primary authorities in theologising; they are the inescapable locations from which we theorise thus to deny or discredit them is disingenuous and, ultimately, impossible.

Continuing with this method of dismantling and rebuilding the foundations of theory and theology, my own thesis begins by outlining feminist expositions of the ways in which traditional eschatology has imbued female bodies with harmful meaning. By engaging with feminist theological literature, it will show how patriarchal theology has constructed eschatology on traits it has identified with male bodies: namely power-over, stability, and control. Accordingly, it has projected the perceived opposites of these onto female bodies: they are deemed to be more relational, fluid, and sensuous. In short, more embodied. This understanding of embodiment has also been used to frame the female body as a form that is inherently and thoroughly material. Through this, patriarchal theology has imaged the female body as being closer to nature and, in its dualistic logic, further from the divine than the male body. Given such constructions, some feminist theologians claim that essentialised definitions of gender have been utilised by patriarchal theology to present a model of eschatology that excludes, devalues, and demonises female bodies. Commenting on such essentialism, Jones (2000, 30) notes that:

> The historic problem with these binaries […] is not that male and female were distinguished, but that the masculine was valued over the feminine. In response [feminist essentialists] argue that present-day feminists need to celebrate and perhaps even privilege feminine distinctiveness.

Although this thesis does not claim to be a work in "feminist essentialism" and does not uphold a belief that "male" and "female" bodies are distinct and oppositional categories, it does detect a need to "celebrate and perhaps privilege" *that which has been identified with female bodies.*

I take this a step further by claiming that certain traits assigned to, and some experiences of, women can be seen to be revelatory for all of creation. Nicola Slee expresses a similar perspective, wherein she purports to "hold up the holiness of ordinary women's and girl's lives, to say that their lives are sacred, worthy of painstaking study, that their lives are revelatory of God" (2013, 17). Slee names this as a form of "strategic feminism" (2013, 17); this is a strategy I similarly employ, as I value traits which exclusively have been assigned to female bodies out of concern for all of creation. I do this by attending to feminist theological appraisals of the traits noted, and also to ways in which some women have experienced them. Whilst this thesis recognises that not all women experience their bodies as relational, fluid, and/or sensuous, the fact that some women do, coupled with the denigration of *all* women through the association, means that listening to and valuing them is necessary.[2] This is strategic as it uses these two foundations in order, to use Jones's definition, to make calculated decisions "about which universals or essentials might work in a given context and which might fail", and subsequently to "craft ones that are emancipatory and life-giving" (2000, 44). This thesis claims, then, that the traits noted here are more "emancipatory and life-giving" for all of creation than those traditionally identified with male bodies.

[2] This does not mean that non-experiences, or difficult experiences, of embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality are overlooked; time is taken in each chapter to attend to various perspectives on these.

Grosz applauds such moves, arguing that they display "feminism's ability to use patriarchy and phallocratism against themselves, its ability to take up positions ostensibly opposed to feminism and to use them for feminist goals" (1994, 95).[3] The goal for this thesis is to propose a "modest universal" (cf. Mount Shoop, 2010, 26) of all eschatological existences by centralising traits that patriarchal theology has identified with female bodies. This is not, however, a universal that reproduces the patriarchal privileging of *one* experience. Indeed, Mount Shoop writes that it is only when experiences are absolved of the "necessity […] to yield ultimate truth" that the integrity and "truth-bearing qualities" of those experiences are honoured (2010, 7). This thesis, then, proposes an eschatological openness that embraces and is shaped by particular experiences of embodied relationality, fluidity and sensuality. It attends to some women's experiences of these in order to affirm and celebrate the truths that they bear.

This primary focus on framings of female bodies shapes the way this thesis engages with the Bible and the Christian tradition. Whilst seeking to contribute a new way of thinking about eschatology, this is not a thesis that seeks to reform or revise the tradition; it does not return to the tradition in order to repair or rescue it. This is not to discredit such approaches, though. As noted earlier, there are a number of thinkers who find merit in such a methodology. Susan Frank Parsons, for instance, consistently engages with traditional thinkers in order to uncover their meanings and intentions against, it seems, misunderstandings or misrepresentations. With reference to Aristotle's and Aquinas's theories on natural law, she calls for a "revaluation" of the

[3] In some ways, this echoes Luce Irigaray's use of mimesis to claim that women must deliberately assume certain roles in order to "convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it" (1985, 76). This resurfaces in Chapter Four, wherein I consider some ways in which patriarchy has subordinated women in the quest for self-love, and Irigaray's suggestions as to how women can affirm their own love and so thwart this subordination.

ways in which such concepts are applied to new situations. In appreciation of this task, she writes (2001, 374) that:

> feminists have gone to some lengths to argue that concepts stated as principles or first premises of ethical syllogisms were not intended by either Aristotle or Aquinas to stand for timeless ideals, and thus that one can change a great many of the details of their reference while staying within the broad region of their meaning.

For Parsons, this means that these thinkers' statements about women can "be revalued and reused in a different context" (2001, 374). Janet Martin Soskice similarly examines the intentions or "motives" for the formulation of certain doctrines. Writing of the construction of the doctrine of the Trinity and "its reliance on Greek philosophical categories", she argues that "we should not confuse the means with the motives for its formulation". Although constructed using Greek philosophy, Soskice contends that the motives for the formulation of this particular doctrine were "pastoral and apologetic" (2002, 136), thus suggesting that despite appearances and a variety of interpretations, the utilisation of Hellenistic philosophy had noble intentions. Both Parsons and Soskice are not here seeking to defend traditional thinkers or concepts in light of feminist critiques but rather to revalue them in order that their efficacy be revealed.

Indeed, Parsons clearly states such a concern in her article "Paradise and the Groundlessness of Ethics". Here, she speaks of the exploration of what it is for human beings to "be in time" and implies a need to be in touch "with ourselves as places for receiving". Considering such notions, Parsons observes that she "must study Aquinas more closely to indicate something of this in what he says" (2002a, 25). For Parsons, a return to the tradition and an approach that writes "out of a critical faithfulness to the Christian tradition" (2002b, 114) is necessary in order that feminism discover "ways of revision" that push orthodoxy "out to, and beyond the edges of its domain" (2002b, 114). This is, then, a critical reading of the tradition that both highlights problematic elements and also rescues beneficial ones.

Such an approach is similarly utilised by Sarah Coakley, as is immediately evident in the titles of some of her works: "Re-thinking Gregory of Nyssa: Introduction - Gender, Trinitarian Analogies, and the Pedagogy of *The Song*" (2002); "Introduction – Re-thinking Dionysus the Areopagite" (2008); and "Prayer, Politics and the Trinity: Vying Models of Authority in Third – Fourth-Century Debates on Prayer and 'Orthodoxy'" (2013). The first two texts respond to renewed interest in the thinkers noted, and attempt to find reasons for valuations of the them; the latter seeks to "bring the themes of prayer, authority and politics together in a fresh way that has both historical instantiation and – I trust – some continuing systematic theological interest" (2013, 379). Thus, Coakley engages with the tradition not only to uncover support for particular theories but also to highlight their current relevance.

Valerie Karras takes this approach a step further by arguing that classical thinkers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, may in fact be *more* beneficial than feminist thinkers. Speaking of Gregory's understanding of the Trinity, she reads his emphasis on the irreplaceability of the "Father" title to be indicative of relationship. As such, she writes that "Ironically, then, the traditional names [for the Trinity] are more feminist, in the sense of interpersonal relationality, than the feminist names" (2002, 248). Her method, much like those already noted, is one of "recovery" which reads for and, as we have just seen, sometimes against, present-day feminist concerns. Karras, although differing from the thinkers noted by recovering the voices of the early Christian East, nonetheless shares a conviction that traditional thinkers have just as much, if not more, to say that is of value than more contemporary thinkers.

Commenting on Coakley but seemingly applicable to all the thinkers noted here, Abraham observes the contention that feminists must begin their theological

reflections by engaging with "classical orthodoxy". In a move that is perhaps more appreciative of feminist theology than Karras, Abraham observes that such a grounding can support feminist theology, particularly in its attempts to "integrate ethics and metaphysics". She writes that "Encounter with classical orthodoxy in prayer purifies and purges [feminist's] impulse to create God in their own image and likeness" (2014, 584). It seems, then, that an engagement with the tradition, in addition to rescuing it from charges of irrelevance and incompetence, also rescues feminist theologians from egoism and self-interest.

These works of recovery are helpful in the sense that they go some way to offering ways of thinking about constructions of doctrine and the perspectives of classical thinkers that are more palatable, and at times beneficial, to feminist theological concerns. However, I detect some problems in these approaches which cause me to pursue a different path. Firstly, the notion that feminist theologians may need classical orthodoxy to temper their theological constructions, as implied by the last quotation, problematically conveys the idea that women can only speak, can only have their "truth-bearing qualities" (Mount Shoop, 2010, 7) honoured, if they are grounded in the malestream tradition. This potentially discredits the value and integrity of women's experiences and the voices of feminist theologians. It may also discount the notion that feminist voices can be as authoritative and revelatory as classical ones. Although exercising a hermeneutics of suspicion in her engagement with thinkers such as McFague, and evidently engaging with classical thinkers, Parsons (2002b, 123) herself appreciates the need for:

> the reclamation of what feminists take to be ultimate value, and for women to be able to know this, to speak of this, and to bring this alive in their activities in the world.

I propose the reclamation and, to use the language of the thinkers noted, the recovery and revaluing of "what feminists take to be ultimate value", namely characterisations

and experiences of female bodies, primarily because these are deemed to be as, if not more, beneficial than classical voices. Indeed, my strategic approach to these characterisations and experiences is here mirrored in the literature I choose to engage with: feminist perspectives are deemed to be just as, if not more, authoritative and revelatory as classical texts for their often hard-learned, critical awareness of their own bisases and locatedness and their consistent attention to experiences of female bodies. The truths that these thinkers bear are thus more self-aware, both of their locatedness and of embodiment; they are, therefore, more useful.

An associated problem is that approaches which re-read the tradition, whilst certainly able to uncover favourable and valuable notions, cannot change the experiences of women who have been hurt by elements of such thought, and the ways in which certain feminist theologians have felt and interpreted the texts. We remember Parson's claim that Aristotle's and Aquinas's statements concerning the "nature of women" can be re-read and revalued (2001, 374), and we may ask whether this overlooks the ways in which such statements have underpinned dangerous framings of women. We may also wonder whether rescuing the intentions and motives of these thinkers can alter this. Indeed, I would go so far as to claim that such rescue missions should not be our focus. There exists a much more pertinent need: to hear the voices of feminist theologians who expose the real and potential dangers of traditional formulations of doctrine. The question should not be whether feminist theologians interpret traditional thinkers correctly, nor should the purpose be to show them how to read correctly. Such inferences potentially suggest that feminist theologians who find traditional texts problematic are simply flawed in their reading practices. Not only is this somewhat insulting, it also delegitimises the problems and pains that have been encountered and experienced, and dismisses the problematic elements of the texts with which they engage. Instead, our focus should be on *why* certain feminist theologians take issue

with particular concepts, doctrines, or perspectives, and *how* they go about imagining more beneficial, though no less critical, constructions. Such an approach both appreciates the voices of feminist theologians and uses them to think in new ways about God and creation.

Indeed, despite the potential for recovering a sense of embodiment in classical constructions of eschatology (evident in Parsons' reading of Augustine's emphasis on the co-existence of the spiritual and the material in paradise (2002a, 19)), no amount of re-reading will alter the fact that traditional accounts entirely overlook women's experiences of their bodies. Such experiences are simply not present, and returning to classical texts will not make them so. Only an approach that takes feminist contentions seriously, and values their affirmations of female bodies, will be able to construct an eschatology that both listens and speaks to lives as they are presently experienced. Thus, feminist theological critiques of eschatology and appraisals of embodiment are made central and are used as the base criteria for my own constructions. This is not to say that traditional formulations must be dismissed as unhelpful to this task, but it is to claim that they should not be our primary focus or our initial grounding.

This thesis, then, does not explore what traditional eschatologies say about embodiment but rather seeks to construct an eschatology that can affirm embodiment, in light of the critiques and constructions of feminist theologians. It seeks to contribute a creative imagining of a more beneficial future than we are presently offered by the tradition, as understood by feminist theologians. In order to do this, it takes seriously and utilises the many and varied ways in which feminist theologians have rethought God and revalued creation. It is thus firmly rooted in feminist perceptions and reconstructions of eschatology, and uses feminist valuations of embodied relationality,

fluidity, and sensuality to develop a specific model of the process, content, and time of the eschaton.

Indeed, some feminist theologians have argued that the sources of the Bible and the tradition can only be retained if they are examined for their efficacy against the overarching concern to affirm women's bodies. Beneficial to this is a methodology which reads for the purpose of liberation. Letty Russell is especially helpful here: her hermeneutical approach attends to concrete experiences of life; in particular to the lives of those who "cry out for deliverance; not simply with those of the 'non-believer' but with those of the 'non-person'" (1980, 105). Russell proposes that these experiences should then be used to question the Bible; an approach supported by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's appraisal of the Bible on the basis of the extent to which it fosters women's liberation (1995, 32). Fiorenza writes that:

> the revelatory canon for theological evaluation of androcentric traditions and their subsequent interpretations cannot be derived from the Bible itself but can only be formulated in and through women's struggle for liberation from all patriarchal oppression.

Engagement with the Bible, then, must begin with a concern for women's bodies if it is to be extrapolated from its oppressive origins and interpretations. Indeed, we will see throughout this thesis that these tools or sources can function as sources of affirmation for the values associated with female bodies in relation to the eschaton. Alike my aims for eschatology, attending to the Bible is worthwhile in order to loosen the hold that patriarchal theology has over it and to reveal its ability to support, rather than thwart, liberation. In starting from values associated with women's bodies, then, I *read* the Bible with a concern to recover and reconfigure affirmations of female bodies, and I *use* the Bible to further develop these into specific, meaningful, and liberating models of the eschatological future.

Despite reading the Bible and the Christian tradition through these lenses, there are certain themes within the tradition that I have chosen not to pay especial or explicit attention to in this thesis. This pertains, for example, to ideas surrounding Christology, final judgement, and the *parousia*. Valerie Karras, though, contends that it is impossible, for her, "to discuss eschatology without discussing Trinitarian theology and Christology, or *theology*, properly speaking" (2002, 245). We remember that Karras's understanding of "*theology*, properly speaking" is that which begins with discussion of who God is and, more specifically, with perspectives on this from the early Christian East (see Karras, 2002, 249). Again, my starting point differs in that I root both my explorations and constructions in feminist perspectives on, and some women's experiences of, embodiment. Furthermore, the specific focus of my thesis is on the finality and ultimacy of the eschaton in relation to this basis; such finality and ultimacy is deemed to be *most* problematic, and to have received little attention in terms of being rethought in more beneficial ways. Thus, whilst other doctrines and constructions are certainly worthy of attention, they are not my primary focus here. As will become clear, though, certain themes and values that emerge in relation to feminist challenges to and reconstructions of Christology, final judgement, and the *parousia* will inform my own constructions. I frame these in terms of the process, content, and time of the eschaton as opposed to using doctrinal or traditional language, as I feel that these categorisations speak more accurately and pointedly to the problems and potentials for rethinking the eschatological future.

More specifically, themes of Christology and the Incarnation are, without doubt, connected to discussions and constructions of eschatology. Accordingly, feminist perspectives on these are explored in Chapter One. As Chapter One will, however, elucidate, these will not be central to my constructions of a new model of the eschaton, given the specificity of my focus. The values upheld by certain feminist readings of

these, such as eros, dunamis, and embodied relational power will, though, be significant and utilised. Similarly, this thesis will not explicitly engage with questions concerning final judgement, or heaven and hell, out of a concern to attend primarily to experiences of embodiment in relation to the eschaton. Still, problematic elements of such thought, particularly with regards to their potential promotion of separation and violence, are noted in Chapter One. Moreover, Chapter Two's emphasis on the universal nature of the future implicitly addresses these concerns.[4] One final aspect of eschatological discussion warrants qualification for its inexplicit presence here; namely, discussion surrounding the *parousia* or second coming of Christ. Moltmann's and Keller's notions of there being a time when God and creation will dwell in and with one another (see Moltmann, 1981, 102; 2010, 79; and Keller 2003a, 215), share similar sentiments to constructions of the *parousia*. Their understandings are given precedence on account of the relationality that they centralise, and their emphasis on the mutual realisation of such a future (in)dwelling. Thus, to reiterate, themes and values upheld and utilised by feminist theologians in relation to Christology, final judgement, and the *parousia* are similarly valued and used here, but specific doctrinal or traditional terminology is not. This is due to a desire to speak more directly and accurately to the problems and potentials with the eschatological future, and not to focus on reforming or rescuing the tradition, for reasons noted earlier.

Having thus identified the tools as being an attentiveness to framings and experiences of women's bodies, and from this, an engagement with the Bible and the Christian tradition, we may now consider the method by which these can contribute to the rebuilding of eschatology. Letty Russell's articulation of eschatological "contradiction" and "affirmation" is helpful here. Russell's starting point is "eschatological

[4] A more thorough examination of these elements of eschatological and soteriological doctrine can be found in my undergraduate dissertation, entitled "In the End – Hell? A Reassessment of the Christian Doctrine of Hell and Alternative Eschatologies" (2008).

hermeneutics", or reading the Bible as and by "beginning from the other end" (1980, 104). Upon this basis she discerns and affirms God's "promised future" (1980, 105) as intending and helping humanity to "become human"; that is, to become loving, gracious, and merciful (1982a, 38). From this she claims we can "contradict" experiences of oppression insomuch as they stand in contrast to "God's goal and purpose for life and creation" (1980, 104). In essence, this means stating *what should not have been*, *what will not be in the future*, and therefore *what should not be now.* For Russell, then, the relationship between contradiction and affirmation is cyclical: contradictions both feed and are fed by affirmations concerning the intentions of God.

However, whilst Russell makes eschatology central and thereby names some specific affirmations and contradictions, I feel that more must be said and done with eschatology. Russell herself would caution against such attempts: sceptical of "conclusions" or "final principles" for their alignment with stasis, she instead affirms the processual nature of "clues" and questions (1979a, 53). This she balances with trust in God's promises, and subsequently claims that we should be "willing to live with a poverty of knowledge about our future because of that trust" (1979a, 165). In contrast, I contend that acceptance of such poverty is unhelpful and unnecessary as eschatology *has* been constructed in such a way that its "conclusions" and "final principles" *have* specified and justified the denigration of female bodies. There is, then, a real need to craft a specific model of eschatological embodiment that challenges these constructions. "Eschatological embodiment" here refers to eschatological existences that are thoroughly and authentically material, the details of which will be developed throughout this thesis. This does not reject spiritual dimensions of embodiment, but it does reject the tradition's notion that eschatological existences are comprised solely of spiritual, immaterial bodies. This model strives not only to contradict the devaluation of female bodies and affirm their value, but also to envision a future wherein that which

was used to devalue them is instead used to celebrate them. Such moves towards construction are appreciated by Grace Jantzen, who claims that without them, "we stay at the same old level as those whom we critique: we do not change the ground" (1998, 25). In the words of Isasi-Díaz, we thus need to "flesh out the shape of the kind of new heaven and the new earth for which justice-seeking people hunger and thirst" (1999, 229). Somewhat paradoxically, then, I use Russell's own explorations to counter her agnosticism, as I argue that we have within our hands sufficient material from which to build a specific image of the eschatological future, which can in turn inform our moves to effect change now.[5] Grasping at this marks the originality of my contribution, as I not only seek to *specify* the eschatological future, but I seek to do so on the basis of attributes aligned with female bodies. This is believed to be a concrete and legitimate basis from which to construct a new understanding and experience of eschatological embodiment.

Along these lines, we may employ two interconnected practices: attentiveness to the past and prophecy of the future. In terms of attentiveness to the past, I suggest we call to memory the ways in which women's bodies have been abused and devalued. These remembrances can whet our appetite for and help us to pursue an eschatology which satiates the desire for an alternative reality. To borrow again from Isasi-Díaz, this is one way of "actively remembering what I do not want the future to be like" (2004a, 342). In looking back to and contradicting what *should not have been* we can foresee and *construct* what should be. These constructions need not be fuelled solely by negation, though; if they were, nothing new would be imaginable but, as I have argued, something new *must be possible*. More specifically, a new model of eschatology must be conceivable if we are to challenge harmful models and construct beneficial ones. Grace

[5] This does not mean that fluidity is usurped by a more specific, stable model of the future but rather fluidity is deemed to endure and abound within the stability of God's embrace, as later chapters will elaborate.

Jantzen again supports this methodological approach; she writes that "the negative is not enough", and that upon this realisation we should "desire to bring about something new, out of overflowing abundance, not out of lack" (2009, 54). Bodies overflow and abound with copious images and experiences that can help to construct something new. Attending to some feminist appraisals and some women's experiences of embodiment in particular can highlight that they are just as worthy in the eschaton, and just as able to speak meaningfully about it.[6]

Elizabeth Johnson provides support for such an approach, as she offers an inspired alteration of Irenaeus's expression *Gloria Dei vivens homo*. Instead, Johnson proposes *Gloria Dei vivens mulier*, by which she means that "the glory of God is women, all women, every woman everywhere, fully alive" (2002, 15). God's glory is dimmed, she claims, by the violation of women but it is increased by women's experiences of flourishing which "anticipate that new heaven and new earth where the glory of God will be unfathomably justified" (2002, 15). The full flourishing of women's bodies, as much as any other bodies within creation, thus images God and God's glory as realised in the eschaton. In addition to this capacity to reflect God's glory, I also suggest that God's tangible presence, and God's tactile perception of and response to creation, can be reflected and constructed in relation to women's embodied sufferings. This is not to divinise or justify such sufferings but rather to appreciate the real impact they have on women's embodied lives and indeed on the life of God. Again, this signifies my appreciation of the complex particularities of personal experiences. Women's bodies in

[6] The newness of this lies not in the assumption that women's experiences of embodiment are intrinsically distinct from men's and thus able to speak something that men cannot, but in the awareness that eschatology has not appreciated and has actively discredited certain aspects of existence through aligning them with women's bodies. As Nicola Slee writes, attending to the experiences of women rather than men does not deny men's realities or the ways in which men and women interact, nor does it "suggest that what is said about women's lives may not have some relevance for men". Rather, she claims, it is "to engage in the process of reclamation, of naming, of making visible women's lives, needs and experiences, in a way which is simply normative for men" (1985, 234-235). By attending not only to feminist affirmations of embodiment, then, but also to some women's lived experiences of embodiment, I conduct a dual-layered challenge to this.

all of their beauty *but no less in their tragedy* will thus emerge as important both to and in eschatology.

Such attention to remembrance and prophecy signifies the dialogical view of the past, present, and future which I will consistently allude to. This approach finds support, again, from Letty Russell; in her I discover one of the few overtly sympathetic feminist voices to eschatology, as may already be evident. Russell sees it as imperative that we begin our theological reflection from the future, as this is the place that is most indicative of God's intentions for creation (1980, 104). Hence her emphasis on "beginning from the other end" and her allusions to remembering the future (1979a, 157). Although the primary focus for Russell is the future, her thoughts about this future are enabled by the experience and knowledge that is garnered from the past and the present. Even though, for Russell, this culminates in agnosticism, I propose that it can actually enable an historical and contextual interpretation of the future, rather than one detached from reality and restricted to a spiritual, ethereal sphere. This emphasises the interconnectivity of all existences, and is manifest in the model of contradiction, affirmation, and construction as they utilise and call upon past remembrances, present realities, and future existences.[7]

The Task Ahead

Before such constructive moves are made, however, I open the discussion in Chapter One by taking seriously and thoroughly surveying the objections raised by feminist theologians against traditional models of eschatology. I begin my explorations by outlining some of the nuances of their critiques; these are distinct and diverse, but

[7] Making assertions about what should not be and what should or will be, and constructing from these bases, feeds into all chapters of this thesis. However, it is most explicitly employed in Chapter Three in order to speak clearly about the content of the eschatological future. Therein, such a methodological approach is deemed to be particularly relevant for speaking about the tradition but, more so, for speaking about our very existences and their nature in the eschatological future.

some shared concerns are detectable. Eschatology is problematised in relation to the claims it makes about the "process" by which eschatology will be brought about, the "content" of such a future, and the "time" in which this process and content will be realised. Respectively, eschatology is challenged for promoting an omnipotent, incorporeal, non-relational God; a static existence; and a delayed hope for liberation. Chapter One follows this categorisation by charting the various contributing voices to exposing these problems, alongside outlining feminist theological responses to them. These responses focus on re-imaging God as embodied and relational; revaluing changeable, material bodies; and redirecting hope to the present.

The resultant chapters emerge out of these contributions and mark my constructive attempts to add to the discussion.[8] Chapter Two begins this by responding to feminist theological critiques of the eschatological process and using their appreciations of embodied relationality in order to posit that the process by which the eschaton is realised is relational. I use this to rethink divine power and so argue that a relational power can lovingly and respectfully draw all into the full experience of relational freedom. This, along with feminist critiques of the content of the eschatological future, draws me into Chapter Three whereby I consider what the existence we will experience in the eschaton may look like. Central to this is an appreciation of embodied change and fluidity (again, in line with many feminist theological perspectives), and I negotiate the possibility of these not only being affirmed but positively abounding in the eschaton. Both Chapter Two's and Chapter Three's reconstructions then feed into Chapter Four's considerations of the ways in which we may live such a future now.

[8] It should be noted that feminist approaches to traditional constructions of the process, content, and time of eschatology tend not only to deconstruct but also reconstruct them, as was alluded to earlier in this chapter. Given that such contributions already exist, my own constructions do not spend time on deconstructing traditional approaches; this has been and is already being done within feminist scholarship. I seek a new approach which, on the basis of the deconstructions that will be noted in Chapter One, contributes to and develops their constructive moves.

Buttressed by feminist theological emphases on present life, I contend that the eschatological future can have a dynamic and beneficial relationship with the present as it can both inform and be shaped by present lives. As noted, each of the respective foci of these chapters emerges out of the problems and potentials I detect within feminist theological literature on eschatology, an assessment of which forms the basis for Chapter One.

## Eschatology from Bodies

### Chapters One and Two: Relational Bodies

More specifically, Chapter One firstly attends to the process of the future actuation of eschatological existence. To reiterate, this is problematised for it is deemed to promote dependence on an omnipotent, omniscient God who will finally bring about the eschaton on behalf of creation. This is coupled with a critique of the Christian tradition's insistence on a timeless God who is in ultimate control of the trajectory of creation. Such an understanding rests on the assumption that God wholly transcends creaturely existence; God creates, knows, and effects the end, but is not affected by or authentically involved in the experiences of creation. This makes claims about God that many feminist theologians (in line with many process philosophers and theologians) find at best unpalatable and at worst dangerous. Catherine Keller, for example, exposes the historical and potential ways in which eschatological or apocalyptic visions, particularly of perfect and complete endings, have served and may in the future serve colonial agendas. She problematizes the association of apocalypse with a discoverable and possessable utopia, for this has led to the discovery, possession, and even penetration of the "motherland and mother earth, the Whore of Babylon and the Virgin Jerusalem" (1996a, 127). Such moves rely on an image of God as one who has already created the "end" and has therefore made it open to conquest (Keller, 1996a, 159). The gendered nature of this suggests that eschatology has legitimised the pillaging of female

bodies and the feminised earth by framing such pillaging as noble utopic pursuits; the realisation of an accessible paradisiacal landscape.

A cacophony of other problems emerges if God has already created the "end"; if the process is always already complete. Such a God neither needs nor desires to be affected by creation, for the "end" is fixed and will be brought about by God alone. The lives of creation are thus inconsequential. Moreover, the stasis and "alreadyness" of the eschaton mean that God cannot be affected by creation; this is buttressed by the historic emphasis on God as impassible and incorporeal. Accordingly, and as already noted, the lives of those members of creation who are most aligned with materiality and the capacities to relate and to feel are thus made inimical to divine, and indeed eternal life (Ruether, 1998a, 138). Furthermore, if brought about by God alone, creation is absolved of agency and God is assigned all and ultimate agency.[9] The lives of creation are thus bound to dependence. Such an understanding has been used to encourage creation to simply, and passively, await future liberation. God emerges here as one who has the power to end oppression but will only use this power in the final time of the eschatological future. Traditional models of eschatology thus depict God as callous and careless. As Catherine Keller writes: "Cast in the role of the controlling providence of our world, God fails horribly" (1995, 198).[10] God is either too distant or too delayed in realising this "providence". Each of these problems contribute to a judgement of traditional understandings of eschatology as relying too heavily on depictions of God as aloof, controlling, incorporeal, and impassible. Such a God, it is claimed, cannot be, and thwarts any attempts to affirm being, relational.

[9] There are complexities to be noted with appraisals of agency, particularly in relation to the observations made in some theologies of disability. These are thoroughly attended to in Chapter Two.

[10] The nuances and particular details of these critiques will be extrapolated in more depth in Chapter One.

There is, then, a felt need amongst many feminist theologians to reconstruct God as one who is relationally involved with creation. Elizabeth Johnson explains that such reconstructions should be the central and primary task of theology for they underpin any moves to overcome dualistic structures and ensure "the flourishing of all people, children as well as men, and the earth and all its creatures" (2002, 69). These affirmations militate against depicting creation as passive and dependent by emphasising creaturely responsibility, in which creation joins with God in the struggle to realise redemption. Embodiment is central to this, for it is argued that God can only relate to embodied beings if God understands embodied beings, and God can only understand embodied beings if God has experience of embodiment; of "immediate sensations as well as direct knowledge" (Jantzen, 1984a, 83). God thus relates by being intimately involved with and affected by creaturely embodiments. Moreover, we remember that there is a need for theology to affirm bodies given the constructions of women as more embodied than men. The affirmation of embodied lives, particularly as they are experienced by women, is thus seen as authoritative in making claims about God's embodiment. These claims are rooted in the conviction that it is in the material particularities of life that God reveals Godself. In light of this, the focus for many feminist theologians is not on trying to make eschatology "fit" with relationality, but rather on re-imaging God's already present, processual relationships with creation.

However, I find myself dissatisfied with the results of these re-imaginings and it is this dissatisfaction that grounds my constructive efforts in Chapter Two. I align myself here with Lee (2007, 408) who argues that:

> An adequate Christian theology must rethink its eschatology and doctrine of God, and demonstrate the compatibility between eschatological belief in God and affirmation of the world.

Theology cannot be content with only rethinking God's relationship with the world *as it presently is*, but must also attempt to rethink God's relationship with the world *as it will*

*be*, for the latter affects perceptions of the former. Feminist theologians have significantly and invaluably rethought the doctrine of God, but there has been little progression from this to sufficiently rethinking the eschatological future. As such, humanity's anxieties and hopes have not fully been appreciated, and we have been left with an incomplete image of both God and creation.[11] Chapter Two thus contends that the above-noted feminist perspectives are limited in their ability to be empowering, for both God and creation, as any final transformation of present experiences of pain and suffering is made impossible; bodies are never free from pain and relationships are therefore always tinged with sorrow. Relationality is thus ever-incomplete for relational intimacy with oneself, with others, and with God (and therefore also *for* God) is never fully realised. Miller alludes to a similar perspective as she writes that "To accept lack and loss as the last words is not only to give up on divinity but also to give up on the full fruits of struggle, as if we already know the outcome" (2009, 82). Against the trend of much, though evidently not all, feminist thought, the degree to which a final "end" is incompatible with a loving and relational God is here challenged.

Appreciating both the necessity and insufficiency of attempts to re-image God, then, I construct an alternative understanding of God that is built on, but is *more than*, the concrete foundations of embodied relationality. This God is intimately related to but also ultimately able to do something for creation; able to offer the ultimate contradiction to anything that would hinder full experiences of embodied

[11] Anxiety over the future should not be underestimated: Isasi-Díaz notes the debilitating force of such fear and thus writes that "We can mitigate our fear of an unknown future by insisting on particulars, by having a concrete vision of the future" (1993, 22). This is precisely what I attempt to do in this thesis.

relationality.[12] Indeed, it is *only* an embodied and relational God who is capable of this, because as Mount Shoop notes, God can only affect embodied beings if God engages in "embodied proximity" to and intimacy with creation (Mount Shoop, 2010, 37). This chapter, then, contends that if God is a God of relation then God must also be a God of the eschaton if such relationality is to be experienced in a full, unhindered manner. I also argue that God can only be *for* creation if God is *with* creation; that God can only be a God of the eschaton if God is a God of relation. Key to my remodelling here is a notion of divine embrace which is understood to be both intimate and spacious, and thus capable of both understanding and honouring the particularities of creation. In using relationality to construct, rather than critique, eschatology, then, I argue for a God who is *even more* committed to and involved with creation than many present feminist theologies allow for.

Chapters One and Three: Enduring, Transformed Bodies

This relational and embodied commitment and involvement which is claimed for God in Chapter Two lays the groundwork for assertions concerning the *content* of eschatology in Chapter Three. It is argued that God's commitment to embodied relationality requires the full and final experience of that embodied relationality. From this it is claimed, in Chapter Three, that if bodies can indeed endure in the future, then embodied change must also endure. This Chapter, however, responds to a slightly different (though not unrelated) set of assumptions made in the Christian tradition than Chapter Two. Assertions made about the content of the eschatological future are exposed by feminist theologians as discrediting embodied relationships, in a similar

[12] There will of course be some who would find my responses unsatisfactory. Catherine Keller, for example, might suggest that "full experiences of embodied relationality" would here be hindered by God's overriding of creaturely agency (2003, 422), whilst Elizabeth Johnson may raise the critique that "Benevolent patriarchy is still patriarchy" (2002, 34). Such contestations serve as reminders that any remodelling of eschatology cannot consist of God overriding creaturely agency, and Chapter Two negotiates the ways in which creaturely freedom and divine intention may co-exist in the co-creation of the eschaton.

way to assertions made about the process of the future. With regards to the content of the eschatological future, though, it is by making embodiment, particularly its characterisation in terms of *female fluidity*, absent or drastically altered.

Emerging from the problems noted with the process of eschatology, then, Chapter One notes that the content of eschatology is also critiqued by feminist theologians for privileging a static existence, framed in terms of disembodiment or spiritual embodiment. Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, argues that the Christian tradition, though not solely defined by Platonic influence, has tended to be unquestioningly proud and protective of it. This influence has impacted eschatology and enabled it to be constructed into a form of spiritual abstraction: both alien and superior to the present realities of earthly, embodied life. She writes that the construction of "man" as akin to the status of God, "outside of and above nature", has served images of the future as a triumph over the material, "a flight of the mind from nature and body to a spiritual (disembodied) realm". Consequently, "visible and bodily existence" is "objectified as inferior" (Ruether, 2002, 67). Such assumptions depict eschatology as a home for the soul and haven for the mind, thus making present embodied existences mere temporary habitats; inherently inferior to the intellectual, spiritual ultimacy of the eschaton. Given the patriarchal association of women with materiality, traditional images of eschatology are thus exposed as proposing the expulsion of women from eschatological existence. The specific and varied perspectives on this are expounded in Chapter One, alongside an appreciation for the importance of theologies which value bodies.

In the case of the latter, many feminist theologians have placed importance on accepting the limitations of embodied life. Indeed, Jantzen writes that "The acceptance of life is an acceptance of limits" (1998, 154). Embodied limitations are here deemed to

be characteristic of the content of life; neither evils to be escaped nor hindrances to be overcome. Whereas Jantzen lists certain enjoyable activities (such as smelling roses) that would be impossible without a body (1984a, 106), Carol Christ communicates a sense of reconciliation with some more difficult aspects of embodied life; namely pain and death. She writes that "Dying is part of living. If we can accept our dying or that of others and not fear it, then we can enjoy whatever time is left as much as possible" (2003, 124). Such perspectives typify much feminist thought on the nature and value of bodily lives, and are explored thoroughly in Chapter One. Appreciation is also shown for diverse and nuanced dimensions of these perspectives; Jantzen, for example, makes bodies central but also argues for their transcendence. By this she means that *personhood*, consisting of both the physical and the non-physical, is primary (1984a, 128) and that all constituent parts of the person strive towards a horizon of transcendence, which is "openness to meaning and reality" (1984a, 125). Carol Christ envisages a future of full participation in the materiality of the world, rather than an escape from it (2003, 133) whereby the death of bodies does not correlate with the cessation of existences but rather with their retention in the body and memory of God (2003, 139). There is some sense, then, in which bodies are affirmed both as they presently are and as they will be in the future.

Despite these allusions to some sense of futurity for bodies, I find them to be insufficient for they either lack specificity concerning the nature of future-bodies, or they remain suspicious of bodies being experienced differently in the eschatological future. Similar to the motivations behind Chapter Two, I respond in Chapter Three by arguing that any adequate and beneficial theology of embodiment needs eschatology in order that all embodiments are fully affirmed, honoured, and experienced. I explicitly employ the method of contradiction, affirmation, and construction in this chapter in order to develop understandings of endurance and transformation. Constructions are

framed in relation to the association of women's bodies with change; embodied change is affirmed as one feature of existence which must endure in the future lest the eschaton continue to perpetuate a patriarchal model of future existence. Reference to such "endurance" then allows room to speak of "transformation" as I assert that there are aspects of existence that *will not* endure. I consider and attempt to construct an existence where anything that jeopardises the integrity of bodies and their ability to flourish fully is contradicted. Contradiction is thus named as the contradiction of death, which rests on an affirmation of embodied life and, more specifically, an embodied life that is transformed in order that it is experienced in full and abundant dynamism.

The feasibility of a future where change endures but death does not warrants careful consideration, as death has often been associated with change and both have been united in their application to women. Grace Jantzen's work is, again, helpful here, for she writes in praise of life in order to counteract not death, per se, but rather religion's preoccupation with it:

> If humans are to find meaning in a life which moves inexorably to death, one strategy for dealing with anxiety is to postulate immortality and a God who guarantees it, especially […] if that God also authorizes mastery over that which reminds of mortality: women, bodiliness, and the earth to which we all return (Jantzen, 1998, 131).[13]

Jantzen thus centralises life and natality in order to remedy what she perceives to be an inordinate focus on (im)mortality. This framing of life in relation to natality, which Jantzen describes as "a love of life" (1998, 152), is universal inasmuch as it recognises natality as a "fundamental human condition" (1998, 144; cf. Samuelsson, 2009, 76), given the fact that we are all birthed. Rather than a masculinist escape from the embodied life that patriarchy has associated with women, then, Jantzen promotes an affirmation of life specifically as it originates in the female body (Jantzen, 2010, 133; cf. Johnson, 2002, 234) for the purpose of cultivating the flourishing and interconnectivity

[13] Again we detect here the intertwining concerns and simultaneous need to reimage God in order to reconstruct eschatology.

of all (1998, 161). Each of these dimensions of Jantzen's work feeds my own, as in Chapter Three I consider some women's experiences of birthing and non-birthing. However, whilst Jantzen argues that she does not deny or trivialize death (1998, 152) she does posit a re-orientation toward "life in this world" (1998, 168). I offer an alternative perspective which *does* take time to attend to the realities of death, but again conducts this with an eschatological focus on life. Thus, I use some women's experiences of birthing and non-birthing as a theological lens through which to interpret the resurrection narratives in order to construct a hopeful reading of both the tomb and the womb; both are seen to be embraced in God's body and to embrace God's body. I therefore present various experiences of birthing, both joyous and tragic, as being indicative of the divine intention for and involvement in the eschatological transformation of death into fully flourishing life. It is thus argued that change can endure *within* transformed eschatological life, as opposed to it being indicative of the move from life to death. The alternative I offer does not, however, focus on eschatological life at the expense of "life in this world", but rather frames it as an existence which can help us to live in this world.[14]

## Eschatology for Bodies

### Chapters One and Four: Present Bodies

It is for this reason that my final chapter turns, most directly, to the present. Attendance to present existences is both a central concern for feminist theology and markedly absent in much eschatological thought, thus I seek to affirm the former by reconstructing the latter. A lack of concern for the present in traditional concepts of eschatology is attributable to the dislocation of hope to a *forever future.* The "time" of

[14] This both/and of the future and the present signifies another way in which Jantzen's work substantiates the attempts I make here, as she was consistently committed to exposing and challenging the gender-assumptions made by traditional dualistic frameworks (see *Healing our Brokenness*, 2010). This also echoes the justification given for centralising relationality in Chapter Two with a concern to overcome dualistic structures and cultivate flourishing.

the future is seen to be one which is perpetually promised but never presently and effectively tangible. The crux of the critique from feminist theologians, as Chapter One explores, is that those who presently experience oppression need help now and not in some distant future. As Ivone Gebara writes, "It is now that something good must happen in my life, now that my distress must be allayed, now that the pleasure of feeling loved and respected must take flesh in my flesh" (2002, 127).[15] In addition to this, such a future is exposed by many feminist theologians as being the tool of a particularly *patriarchal* oppression as it has been used to convince the oppressed, who so often are women, to endure suffering. Citing the experiences of the character of Celie in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, Karen Baker-Fletcher notes that "instead of fighting back or trying to get out, [she] resorted to dreaming of heaven" (1998, 121). Whilst the comfort provided by such a perspective is noted, time is taken to outline the danger of a future that delays hope and encourages submission to suffering. In such a model, suffering is seen as both a noble précis to future existence and an impermanent state of being. The endurance of pain is seen to form the soul and diminish the body; again, the former is deemed to be permanent and superior, and the latter a mere hindrance. Liberation theologians have long critiqued this model, and feminist liberation theologians in particular are vociferous in their desires to dismantle it. Prominent here are the voices of womanist and *mujerista* theologians, who emphasise the need to relocate and redirect focus to the present. Isasi-Díaz, for example, calls for a theology of liberation that is feasible, focussed, and organized (2004a, 348; 344). The emphasis amongst feminist theologians in response to traditional models of eschatology is consistently and unswervingly on the present, then. Whereas responses to problems with the process and content of eschatology focussed on the present in order to affirm divine and creaturely embodied limitations, the focus here is on

[15] Again, an intertwining of problems is noted, for a similar critique was raised in relation to the process of eschatology whereby a God who knows and has already created the end was deemed to be aligned with a God who can alleviate suffering but does not do so now. Chapter Two answers this challenge by, as noted, emphasising the relational realisation of the end.

attending to the practicalities of achieving liberation in the here and now, however limited this may be.

Theologians who attend to these issues are perhaps the most sympathetic feminist voices to an eschatological perspective, for there is a hope that presently limited liberation will be fully realised in the future. Indeed, Isasi-Díaz couples her emphasis on feasibility with an appraisal of desire and hope (2004a, 348) and Gebara writes that "We are not using hope to bet on the future without trying to taste in the present a certain possibility of what one hopes for in the future" (2002, 127). There is, then, an intertwining of present-practice and future-hope for these thinkers, as that which is strived for in the present is empowered by a hope that it will be experienced in full in the future. The Kingdom or "kin-dom" of God is thus redirected to the here and now by feminist liberation theologians.[16] Even these perspectives, though, falter when it comes to specifying "what one hopes for in the future". Although there is a definite sense of hope for liberation and justice and these are given importance, the particular ways in which they may be achieved and the characteristic nature of their fulfilment are lacking. Having spent time in Chapters Two and Three attempting to achieve such specificity by naming eschatology as a relational process and a changing content, I thus move in Chapter Four to exploring some ways in which such a future can impact the present. This further locates my constructive efforts amongst feminist theological voices, as I am sensitive to the critique that traditional eschatologies express a lack of concern for the present. Furthermore, I have a real desire that my constructions not be

[16] The term "kin-dom" is proposed by Isasi-Díaz to counteract the language of "Kingdom". She posits kin-dom to emphasise mutuality and responsibility (2004b, 53). Similarly, Fiorenza uses the Greek term *basileia* to emphasise discipleship in the present and the "alternative world of justice and well-being intended by the life-giving power of G-d" (1993, 12). Both seek to address the notion that "God as king is in his kingdom – which is not of this earth – and we remain in another place, far from his dwelling" (McFague, 1987, 65). Some sources I refer to over the course of the following chapters will make reference to "kingdom", so it is important to note here my agreement with McFague's interpretation of the meaning of "kingdom" and my appreciation of these proposed alternatives.

dislocated from the present but rather offer a meaningful and novel way for us to anticipate and create a relational and fluid embodied eschatology. Again, then, I propose a dialogical relationship between the past, present, and future, whereby the future is constructed on the basis of contradicting or affirming what has been and what is. These constructions can then return us to the present as we seek to live now in ways that realise the eschaton. Elizabeth Johnson (2002, 64) would appear to support such a move, as she writes:

> Lament over women's suffering and celebration of women's creative agency couple with hope for a future that will be more beneficial. The energy released by this turning sustains practical efforts for change of structures and consciousnesses here and now.

Having both lamented and celebrated perspectives on and experiences of female bodies in Chapters One, Two and Three, Chapter Four seeks to fulfil Johnson's assertion by suggesting some values and practices that may help us make present the eschatological future that has been constructed. These values and practices can certainly be made manifest without reference to the eschaton, but my contention is that the unequivocal and specific affirmation of embodied relationality and fluidity in the eschaton can cast an informative lens back to us and so help us embody them *in a specific way*.

The practice of touch emerges from these chapters as an incontrovertibly embodied way of both celebrating and lamenting relational and changing embodiments. Touch is further presented as appropriate, particularly for a feminist reconstruction of eschatology, because the sensuality of tactility is another feature of existence that has been aligned with women and subsequently *maligned*. It was noted earlier how epistemology and embodiment have traditionally been dichotomised; in contrast I claim that affirming bodies through touch can remedy such distortions and value tactile communication and understanding. Furthermore, I will show how neglecting the experience of and ability to feel and touch, or depicting them as inferior and

inconsequential features of existence, only serves to further invalidate embodied life. It is in response to such suspicion of sensuality that Isasi-Díaz (2004a, 349) claims:

> Only our insistence on regaining our pleasureloving selves will allow us to become fully incarnated, to value our bodyselves, to embrace our sexuality, and to pay attention, appreciate and liberate our desires for our own life of fullness of life-liberation.

Thus, attending to and affirming touch enables the embrace and liberation of embodied lives. In relation and addition to this, and most crucially for this chapter, touch is also seen to be capable of embodying, most tangibly and intimately, an embodied eschaton.[17] Given my argument for the dialogical relationship of the present and the future, though, the eschaton is also deemed to be able to inform such practices. Thus, practice and touch are united in this chapter specifically in relation to an embodied eschaton.

In addition to this, touch is made central for it also has the potential to embody an embodied eschaton simply by affirming the existence and significance of bodily life. In short, tactility cannot be practised without bodies. The exploration goes further, though, and asserts that touch, when appropriately negotiated, can also embody the eschaton in radical and novel ways by developing our capacities to be in touch with our own and each other's bodies in loving and life-affirming ways. In this way, touch can be empowering. A crucial corollary to this assertion must, however be an appreciation of the ways in which touch has and may be fraught with problems; when touch has been and is hurtful. I propose a tactile practice which can mediate and facilitate our care and grief for hurting bodies and also which can embody the power of soothing, palliative touch. Again, the simple fact of being tangibly present to another is affirmed here. In addition to this, the chapter also claims that such touch can acknowledge the reality of pain and anticipate a future where bodily pains are transformed. I suggest that we

[17] My references to an "embodied eschaton" do not express an homogenous and singular embodiment in the eschaton, but rather an eschaton where all are embodied in different ways.

attend to these instances and experiences of hurt and pain and challenge them not only by naming them as anti-eschatological but also by constructing a practice of touch that is sensitive to such experiences. I will also, then, note the need for spaces in touching, even places where touch is inappropriate. In conjunction with this I will suggest that an eschatological affirmation of relational and changing embodiments informs us of the need to provide space to let others be in their own embodied particularity. Such "spacing" will be said to mirror the spacious embrace of God, thus enabling it to be practised in both hope and trust that ourselves and others will experience a future of bodily reconciliation where touch *is* empowering and communicative, and no longer hurtful or abusive.

Self-touch will be presented as a corollary to achieving this. Self-touch, in addition to being valued for its capacity to develop self-love, is affirmed as one way in which touch can be practised when abusive touch has been experienced; when the touch of others may be too painful. This is claimed particularly in relation to women as, like with so many other values and experiences reclaimed here, self-love is something that has been consistently denied to women. Female bodies lovingly touching themselves (Rivera, 2007, 97) are affirmed as appropriate and powerful manifestations of an eschatology that affirms our embodiments. This, coupled with attention to touching our own and each other's hurting bodies, leads me to speak of a hope in God's loving touch which cannot hurt. Far from ending on a pessimistic tone, then, I suggest that this final consideration can be infused with hope by looking to a future in which tangible and sentient embodied beings can once again *and even more so* live as dynamically relational beings.

## Conclusion

In summary, the eschatological future contains both problems and potentials for the affirmation of bodies generally, and women's bodies specifically. Categorised in terms of "process", "content", and "time", eschatology is problematized for respectively promoting a non-relational God, a static existence, and a delayed hope. It is now appropriate to explore these problems in more depth, alongside offering a substantial exploration of the responses that such problems have evoked from feminist theologians. As noted, these responses have focused on reclaiming and naming the affirmation of relationality, fluidity, and sensuality as they are presently, albeit limitedly, experienced. By beginning with such an investigation I will then be able to ground and situate my own attempts at constructing a feminist theology of eschatological bodies.

## 1. Feminist Theology and Eschatology

### Introduction

Eschatology has thus far been outlined as containing both problems and possibilities in relation to perceptions of women's experiences of embodiment. The possibilities I will attempt to fulfil in chapters Two, Three, and Four are informed by feminist theologians' appraisals, and women's present experiences of their bodies. The need for such affirmations arises out of feminist theologians' expositions of the patriarchal devaluation of characteristics and experiences associated with women's bodies. Traditional constructions of the eschatological future are deemed, by many feminist theologians, to concretise such devaluation. This chapter, then, assesses both the problems and responses that feminist theologians have exposed and proposed. In order to do this I will conduct a survey of feminist theological perspectives on the process, content, and time of eschatology. These categorisations encapsulate some central themes in feminist readings of traditional understandings of eschatology; namely power and relationality, change and death, and the relationship of the future to the present. Moreover, constructions of the process underpin models of the content and assumptions about the time; problems in the latter two aspects are drawn out of problems identified in the former. Thus the most substantial exploration is directed towards discussions concerning the process of realising the eschaton.

For each of these three themes I will firstly outline the problems as perceived and exposed by feminist theologians. This is undertaken with an awareness that certain traditional constructions may *unintentionally* be problematic for women. Yet, as Fiorenza writes, "all theology, willingly or not, is by definition always engaged for or against the oppressed" (1995, 6). Vuola adds to this that whilst many may claim that theology has not denied full humanity to women, a careful study of the tradition's history reveals that "women (and other Others) have been defined as less or different

from the authentic *imago dei* that only (free) men normatively present" (2002, 116). Willingly or not, then, traditional eschatology has largely been engaged in theorising against women's embodied lives. Thus my concern for this chapter, and indeed for my thesis, is not with whether the feminist theological critiques of traditional views are *correct* or *accurate*. More pertinent is how these views have been received by feminist theologians and the legacy left by such interpretations. It is this that the feminist theologians in this chapter are often critiquing and similarly that to which I respond. This chapter, then, aims to explore feminist theological approaches to eschatology by attending to both critiques and reconstructions of traditional notions of eschatology. In so doing, I seek to uncover the problematic elements that my own eschatological model must avoid or rethink, and also to discover some perspectives that hold potential to help develop a new understanding of the eschatological future.

**Process: Eschatology and Omnipotence**

The first major theme I detect in the literature is a consideration of traditional constructions of the process of eschatology. Essentially, this pertains to how the end is deemed to be brought about and what type of God may do this. The theologians included here all engage with different formulations of this process; most prominently, though, their attention is directed toward traditional Christian understandings of the eschatological process as one of rescue or conquest. What will become clear is that feminist readings of traditional models of the eschatological process highlight how this underpins traditional understandings of both the content and the time of the eschaton; hence their primacy in this assessment. The thinkers I will engage with share a concern that traditional theological models of the actuation of the eschaton rest on the construction of God as omnipotent. Connected to this are concerns surrounding the presentation of God as omniscient, impassible, incorporeal, and immutable. Feminist

perceptions of the problems with these constructions will thus be explored here, as will their responses.

Problem: Eschatology is Realised by God Alone

The first problem that feminist theologians have identified with the eschatological process is that it constructs divine power as omnipotence, understood as power which is exerted over creation in a unilateral expression of dominance. Feminist theological and philosophical explorations of divine omnipotence are often informed by the work of process philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne in particular helps us to see the relevance of the doctrine of divine omnipotence to eschatology, as he writes that "The omnipotence of God has been valued as a guarantee of the victory of good over evil" (2001, 109). This battle between good and evil is often constructed as a cosmic and spiritual battle, and one which will culminate in the apocalyptic end-time. Assessing the omnipotence of God from an eschatological perspective is thus appropriate, for such a God infers an eschatology of conquests and crusades, and eschatology in its traditional constructions relies on such a God. Given the focus of my thesis, though, the thinkers who are most relevant here are those whose assessments of omnipotence are consistently and explicitly undertaken in relation to both feminist theology and the process of actuating the eschaton; contributions offered by Christ, Keller, and Brock are arguably the most extensive and relevant.[18]

[18] It should be noted that Keller also offers a significant and substantial challenge to *creatio ex nihilo* in her book *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (2003a) which upholds many of the critiques made in other similar works and also adds to them a model of creation from the depths of an ever-existent chaos (2003a, 19). This "creation from the depths" is helpful in considering an eschatology "from the depths", and is much akin to Moltmann's model of an eschatological divine-creation interpenetration (2004, 158), which will be utilised in Chapter Two.

Carol Christ's interrogation of omnipotence, most evident in her 2003 work *She Who Changes: Re-Imagining the Divine in the World*, makes reference to the future, but is primarily concerned with challenging and reconfiguring gendered constructions of divine power. Christ has dedicated a vast amount of her work to challenging the Christian tradition's preservation and promotion of a doctrine of divine omnipotence. Her recent article entitled "Goddess with Us: Is a Relational God Powerful Enough?" (2013) indicates the enduring relevance of the discussion. Most significant, though, as noted, is Christ's 2003 work *She Who Changes.* In this text, Christ expresses both sensitivity to the desire for an omnipotent God and a substantial challenge to such a God. Christ acknowledges that "We want to believe that there is some time when good will be rewarded and evil will be punished"; a time when all things will be made well (2003, 37). Christ suggests that such a desire is, however, a type of psychological anaesthetic which, though comforting, ultimately thwarts freedom and relationality (2003, 37; 40). Relationality cannot co-exist with an omnipotent God, Christ contends, because such a God is too far removed from and disregarding of creation (2003, 86). Christ suggests that this connotes a God who cares little for creation, and as such is a God with whom we would be wary, if not incapable, of forming relationships.

In line with this, Christ infers that an omnipotent God is one whose perfection is defined by non-relationality and, she contends, this frames our own perfection as becoming "as independent of relationships as possible" (2003, 35). She further writes that the traditional image of God is one who is "related to none". Christ notes that process philosophy asks "how [this God] could possibly become an object of worship" (2003, 86), and she adds to this that such a God cannot possibly care for creation, thus she enquires, "why should we care about him?" (2003, 86). For Christ, then, models of divine omnipotence imply that the future is one in which we will become perfect by becoming non-relational.

This seems a legitimate critique: if God holds *all* power then creation is bound to dependence and obedience, neither of which forms acceptable bases for healthy relationships. This is further problematised by the observation that, in addition to the unfeasibility of creation relating to an omnipotent God, an omnipotent God on account of "his" very omnipotence cannot be a relational God. Jantzen notes the sentiment within the Christian tradition that "most of our sensations are too *trivial* to apply to God" (1984a, 82), with Porter attributing such notions to the dualistic separation of transcendence and human existence which, she writes "has kept God apart from the ordinary, earthly, everyday matters of life" (2013, 98-99). Experiences of relationality are thus paralleled with triviality and removed from divinity; perhaps, Christ posits, on account of their concurrent parallel with women (2003, 92). In such a construction, God is relationally and existentially superior to creation, ultimately transcending the trivialities of personhood framed particularly in terms traditionally associated with women.

Rita Nakashima Brock, in her 1995 text *Journeys by Heart*, helps to advance Christ's exploration of power and relationality. She writes that when power is viewed as something to be possessed by an individual then relational or "connecting" power and vulnerability "will be seen as threats to, rather than enhancements of selves" (1995, 33). Grace Jantzen takes this critique further and implies that underpinning all of these assumptions concerning divine power and knowledge lies a doctrine of divine incorporeality (1984a, 28). Whereas problems with omnipotence and omniscience emerge as most explicit in the critiques of the eschatological process, we must also interrogate inferences made in the tradition to divine incorporeality. As Jantzen later writes, "It is the disembodied nature of the (nevertheless masculine!) divine which has

served as the lynchpin of the western masculinist symbolic" (Jantzen, 1998, 269). Christ (2003, 47) adds weight to this contention, and writes that:

> In traditional western thinking, change is given an exclusively negative evaluation […] Since the body is the location of death and decay, the human body and all bodies were found lacking.

Thus it has been deemed inappropriate to speak of an embodied God as to do so would be to assign the transience and limitations of death and decay to God's being. This is an issue that concerns feminist theologians in particular because, as Christ notes, "Women have been the scapegoats in much traditional thinking about change and the body" (2003, 48), with women's bodies becoming the location of the vilification of the material. In such a construction, God's knowledge of and relationships with creation do not require, and are even hindered by, corporeality and materiality: this only perpetuates the idea that femininity is incompatible with, and even jeopardises divinity.

Jantzen claims that such a view is inconsistent. She writes that "it would be mistaken to suppose that being disembodied would be complete freedom from limitation", as that which exists without a body is unable to partake in embodied activities. An incorporeal being, Jantzen argues, "could not climb trees, sniff roses, or embrace friends" and such a being is therefore, according to Jantzen, limited (1984a, 106). Thus, to claim that God can only know all there is to know by existing without a body is illogical, as embodied experience and knowledge remains exterior and unintelligible to such a being. To then claim that we can relate to such a being only compounds the problem. Jantzen (1984a, 34) concurs, arguing that:

> the notion that an invisible entity, in no way perceivable by the senses, is more accessible to knowledge than a material object of which we can have sense data sounds foreign to our ears.

The contention made here is that bodies are integral to the lived experiences of creation, thus to suggest that God is disembodied yet somehow capable of knowing and

relating to creation is unfeasible. Incorporeality, then, rooted in and supporting God's omnipotence and omniscience, is exposed by Jantzen as inappropriate, incomprehensible, and ultimately impossible to assign to a God who properly appreciates and experiences relationships with creation.

Feminist theologians have also noted that the traditional presentation of God's omnipotent control over and knowledge of the future thwarts creaturely freedom. Indeed, Carol Christ implies that a controlled future is always an already determined future. She writes that "It makes sense to say that God knows the future only if it is also assumed that God creates it in every detail" (2003, 39). An omnipotent God is thus always, for Christ, an omniscient God. Christ's major contention with this is that it ultimately and totally compromises human freedom; she writes that "In this case, there is again no room for human freedom" (2003, 39). Grace Jantzen concurs with Christ and writes that a future which is already actual and known in God "raises enormous questions about the possibility of genuine human freedom and creativity", for our choices and their results emerge as strictly predestined (1984a, 53-54). Creativity and novelty are understood by Jantzen, then, to be thwarted by a God who always already knows their inspiration and intention. In response to such contestations, Christ claims that the reality and necessity of human freedom cannot but mean that the future is unknown to God: "Because individuals really are free, the future of the world cannot be known, not even by Goddess/God" (2003, 195). Christ uses Charles Hartshorne's "zero policy" to interrogate divine power, deducing that if God holds all power then creation holds none (2013); similarly, if God holds all knowledge then creation holds none and, accordingly, creation thus has no freedom meaning that God possesses all freedom. In order for creation to have freedom, in Christ's understanding, both God's power and knowledge cannot be absolute; as such, God cannot feasibly control or know the future. This means that the future is undetermined; hence the resistance amongst many

feminist theologians in attempting to speak in any definite manner about the nature of the future.[19]

Catherine Keller's critique, as articulated in "Why Apocalypse, Now?" mostly focuses on the suggestion that eschatology offers a "final solution", to be realised by God alone (1992, 187-8). Similar to Christ, the crux of Keller's critique rests on assumptions made in the tradition pertaining to God's *control* over the process of actualising the eschaton. Keller's contributions are invaluable to my own, as will become clear; most significant here, though, is her book *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (1996a), and her articles "Why Apocalypse, Now?" (1992) and "Power Lines" (1995). In these offerings, Keller makes the connection between omnipotence and the future more explicit, as she draws parallels between omnipotence and the reliance on divinely actuated final solutions. This is said to be problematic for two reasons: God is imaged as holding all of the power to effect the eschaton, and this power is very often framed as being exercised in a partisan fashion. When God's eschatological power is framed as partisan, as favouring a select group of people who will ultimately inherit the Kingdom or be saved in the end, then the oppression of one group by another, more powerful one, is given divine credence. Indeed, Keller notes that the classical, patriarchal God "carries with it the central image of liberation as something accomplished by a 'Holy Warrior'" who ultimately separates the evil from the good in the "endtime mythos of the final solution" (1992, 187-8). Grace Jantzen adds weight to this critique, noting that "in the century [of] Auschwitz we should in any case view the very idea of 'final solutions' with grave suspicion" (1998, 221). The critique we can discern from these perspectives is that the eschatological separation of people into "good" and "evil", or "saved" and "damned", by the "Holy Warrior" God, whose power

[19] Concerns surrounding freedom are of particular import for feminist theologians, who highlight the tradition's construction of freedom as a male prerogative. Such perspectives are explored and responded to in Chapter Two of this thesis.

for creation is partisan and is thus measured by exerting power over another group of people, legitimises the violent actions of those who believe themselves to be members of the favoured group against those constructed as wicked and wanting. Whilst one group may perceive God's power as benevolent, then, eschatology is charged here with ignoring the other perspective from which such power is experienced as oppressive.[20]

Keller has further noted that in addition to traditional models of eschatology relying on an omnipotent God, such a God actually requires eschatology. Charting the development of eschatological thought, Keller notes that, initially, eschatology did not refer to a "final divine intervention" but rather to "a historical transformation, when right relations reign once more, labor is not exploited, and people ripen like their grapevines" (1996b, 86). However, in the books of Isaiah and Daniel, Keller detects a shift from this "historical transformation" to a transformation of history wherein God will fulfil God's promises by finally ending "history itself" (1996b, 86). Keller attributes this change in thought to a sense of disappointment, which helps to explain her critique of omnipotence. She argues that disappointment in God would be perceived as a failure of God were God not "hedged around by all sorts of untestable eschatological promises" (1995, 198). By deferring the fulfilment of God's promises to a future-time, theology has "disguised" God's failures (Keller, 1995, 190) by appealing to a divine plan or intention which will finally overcome all pain and suffering. Theology is thus accused of moulding eschatology into a panic-room for God, so that when God does not act, when God's power is seemingly absent, God is protected. Carol Christ supports Keller's case, writing that "Any God who could have stopped the holocaust should have done it" (2003, 97). A God who holds the power to realise the eschatological cessation of pain

[20] In light of these critiques, it would seem feasible for feminist theologians to favour more egalitarian models of the future; universal salvation, for instance. However, problems remain with these models, particularly with regards to their framings of divine power and human responsibility. Nevertheless, I detect in them beneficial elements that are capable of responding to the problems noted here, and so I thoroughly assess them in Chapter Two of this thesis.

and suffering, but does not fully exercise this power now, is stripped of eschatological protection by Christ and Keller and exposed as one who either controls the process but does not care for creation, or who does care for creation but does not control the process. Keller and Christ favour the latter response, as will be outlined shortly. Given the problems noted with eschatology thus far, a trend is clearly beginning to emerge: feminist theologians are evidently suspicious about the eschaton and prefer instead to attend to the concerns and needs of present life (a perspective that will be explored later in this chapter). In short, it seems that a God who has power over suffering and death should exercise that power now and not only, or only fully, in the eschatological future.[21]

In addition to these problematic models of God depicted by the eschatological process, Keller also detects further problems for creation. The notion of a God who assures final solutions promotes, Keller argues, a twofold submission and subscription to systemic oppression. She writes that "To leave the future to God means in fact to leave it to the overpowering systemic forces" (1992, 193), for it inspires only complacency and reticence in the face of oppressive powers. If the process of realising the eschaton is under the control of God alone then we have no choice but to "leave it to God" for we hold no power to realise that future ourselves. Any power we do exercise must either be subordinated to God's intentions or ineffective in thwarting them. In this model of eschatology, creation is necessarily constructed as inescapably dependent on God. These are particularly gendered concerns, as Keller notes that "Patriarchal power apotheosizes itself primordially in its construction of divine power" (1995, 193). Models of divine power that rest on divine independence and dominance thus justify and glorify the same pursuits of power in patriarchy, and add further credence to a construction and promotion of women as passive and dependent.

[21] In attempting to construct an alternative model of the eschatological process, then, part of my task will be to reconcile an eschatological God with a loving God.

Problem: Eschatology is Realised by God through Jesus

Rita Nakashima Brock's explorations in *Journeys by Heart* (1995), alongside her work with Rebecca Ann Parker in *Saving Paradise* (2008), provide lucid and extensive contributions to this discussion. Brock and Parker observe how constructions of divine power validated historical and violent pursuits of a utopic paradise, and they make reference to such sentiments and actions in the Pilgrim's notions of the New World (2008, 340). Keller similarly notes Columbus's documentation of his conquests and his inference to their divine sanctification and revelation (1996a, 159-160). These allusions to divine sanctification of violent conquests benefit from a model of God whose power operates in a violent, conquering manner. Furthermore, these actions appear to depict the eschatological process, that is, the realisation of paradise, utopia, or apocalypse, as being achieved through these violent and conquering actions. In light of this, it is suggested that divine possession of ultimate power also condones, if not encourages, the possession of people, and more specifically those defined as "other" who, most consistently, are women. Brock detects such actions of overpowering in traditional constructions of salvation and atonement. Jesus, Brock observes, was seen to have "faced his enemies alone" in a battle of independent powers, with God's total and final power ultimately conquering "sin and death" (1995, 91). Traditional models of salvation and atonement, in Brock's understanding, thus emphasise unilateral and paternalistic power.

Grace Jantzen agrees that the Christian tradition has presented Jesus as a figure of heroism (1998, 160). This is identified as a problematic construction for numerous reasons by a number of feminist theologians. Similar to the critiques posed in relation to the independence and dominance of God in actuating the eschaton, objection is raised to the presentation of Jesus as the one protagonist in realising salvation. Jantzen

further explains that "Once again, the picture of a heroic figure swooping in to rescue the damsel in distress is all too reminiscent of familiar male fantasies" (1998, 163). So not only do feminist theologians assert that the tradition presents Jesus as independent in his salvific action, but they also claim that this action is deemed to hinge on his incarnation as a male-hero. Furthermore, the heroic male is seen to be rescuing a *passive and patient female victim*.

Susan Faludi helps us to place these considerations into present-day events. Her book, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (2008) assesses various depictions of women as passive and submissive victims. She notes the persistence of such thought in popular media and current events by explaining the "rescue drama" evident in reports concerning the events of September 11th 2001. She notes that the predominant narrative circulating at the time was one that wanted women to remain victims in order to reinforce notions of the ideal masculine saviour (2008, 177; cf. 44). This narrative was present in stories such as those concerning Private Jessica Lynch, a soldier captured in Iraq who performed heroic feats but whose heroism, Faludi observes, "fell uncomfortably outside of the girl-in-need-of-rescue script" (2008, 174). Hence the ensuing misrepresentation of Lynch not as a soldier and certainly not as a hero herself, but rather as "Precious Little Jessi": "a helpless white girl snatched from the jaws of evil by heroic soldiers" (2008, 166). Such emphasis on rescue and victimisation, Faludi argues, runs the risk of emphasising the victorious and glorious rescue by demanding that "women be saved from more and more gruesome violation to prove their saviour's valor" (2008, 262). Indeed, Lynch was said to have been subjected to abuse even from the hospital workers who, Lynch later revealed, were "wonderful" and attentive in their care of her (Faludi, 2008, 171). These perspectives imply that the "rescue" motif not only perpetuates patriarchal notions of a powerful, male hero but that it also posits women as passive and patient victims whose

victimhood may be intensified by increasing levels of violation, and vilification of others, in order to exaggerate the man's heroism.

Rosemary Radford Ruether presents further concerns with the concept of a unique male saviour. Echoing Daly and her argument that "when God is male, the male is God" (Daly, 1973, 19), Ruether expounds Aquinas' view that women cannot represent the full *imago Dei* (Aquinas, 1948, 472; Ruether, 1998b, 84), noting that such an understanding implies that "Just as Christ had to be incarnated in the male, so only the male can represent Christ" (Ruether, 2002, 106). When Jesus' maleness is understood in such a way, maleness in general is elevated to a level of superiority over femaleness. As Daly observes, "The idea of a unique male saviour may be seen as one more legitimation of male superiority" (1973, 71). Imaging Jesus as uniquely and essentially male in his salvific role, it is argued, suggests that the male body is the only one worthy and able to both receive God incarnate and to reflect the image of God (cf. Brock, 1995, 56). The male is thus made the sole possessor of the power to realise the eschaton. This produces a dualistic system in which maleness is aligned with action and femaleness with passivity. The eschatological reliance on the salvific actions of Jesus is understood by feminist theologians to compound such dualisms.

Depictions of Jesus as the sole actor in the realisation of the eschatological process of salvation are further problematised by considerations of *what effects this process.* This area of discussion has benefited from a great deal of attention in the feminist theological sphere. Brock's contribution is again indispensible here; she argues that the images of God and Jesus that traditional models of atonement present are grounded in, and therefore justify, abusive structures. She draws parallels between the omnipotent father and the suffering son, and the "fusion" that she detects in abusive parent-child relationships (1995, 56). Jesus's heroism is thus précised by his submissive suffering;

the former depicted as being enabled by an omnipotent God, the latter as required by such a God. According to Brock, dependence both on a God who exercises more power than us and on a Jesus who experiences more suffering than us ultimately diminishes our own power and frames our own suffering as insignificant (1995, 56). This is symptomatic of Christianity in general, Brock contends, which has upheld patriarchal familial structures and in so doing "has ignored the suffering of women and children in its very center" (1995, 3). When the process of eschatology hinges on Jesus' suffering and subsequent heroic victory, both in the service of an omnipotent God, then our own experiences of suffering, along with our power to challenge these sufferings, are understood to be lessened.

Indeed, it is argued that if Jesus' self-sacrificial, obedient, and submissive death is understood to be integral to salvation then such "qualities" are glorified and recommended. Brock and Parker note such sentiments in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux who, they claim, thought "killing, dying, and suffering were spiritual modes of communion with Jesus" (2008, 287). This is further problematised by feminist readings of the tradition as inferring that submission to this "killing, dying, and suffering" was the appropriate posture of women. Alongside her work with Brock, Rebecca Ann Parker has joined with Joanne Carlson Brown to elucidate this matter further. Their article, "For God So Loved the World?" (1989), provides a comprehensive assessment of the numerous problems with traditional atonement theologies. They surmise that women have, in both church and society, "been assigned the suffering-servant role" which is made all the more dangerous by its parallel assignation to Jesus and the supposed redemptive nature of his submissive suffering. They deduce that "if we define an instance of suffering as positive or necessary for salvation, we are persuaded to endure it" (1989). Locating salvation in the atoning death of Jesus, then, for Brown and Parker, advocates a model of suffering as salvific

that is a particular concern for feminist theologians given the identification of women as the "suffering-servant". Ruether (1998c, 61) substantiates such observations and writes:

> Salvation does not liberate women from male domination here on earth, but teaches them to redouble their submission to their earthly lords […] to anticipate that heavenly state in which redeeming grace empowers us to submit our wills to the will of God. Before God all Christians are as women.

Ruether's contention is that the ideal Christian is imaged as being submissive, and this is often associated with femininity. From this it is inferred that repression of oneself is integral to heavenly existence; in assessing thoughts concerning the content of the eschaton, we will see that this is a recurrent theme in the discussion. Such a perspective potentially provides divine justification for earthly relations characterised by structures of domination and oppression, because it imbues suffering and submission with redemptive power thus suggesting that punishment and violence are sanctioned, even demanded, by God. Indeed, when one considers this sanctioning of submission alongside Ray's observation that women are so often the victims of oppression and abuse (1998, 58), the dangers of promoting submission and self-sacrifice are amplified.

Althaus-Reid and Isherwood (2007, 91) offer yet more support for perspectives such as Brown and Parker's, even advancing their case by being explicit about the specific dangers of atonement theologies for women. They observe that:

> By ritualizing the suffering and death of Jesus into a salvific act Christian theology has disempowered the oppressed and abused and therefore encourages the cycle of abuse. It appears that while we continue to think of the death of Jesus as salvific by its very nature, instead of an outrageous act of public torture and social control, we put the lives of women at risk.

Again, Brock offers confirmation of such a perspective by claiming that Jesus' death and resurrection was depoliticised and made spiritual: in addition to the "battle" being between unilateral powers, as noted earlier, this "battle" is consigned to a spiritual

realm. As such, action against oppression is dislocated to another realm.[22] It is for this reason that Brock writes, "Only a transcendent deity can save us, for all human power has failed" (1995, 91). Given the feminist theological critiques of presentations of an omnipotent God thus far explored, it seems human power was destined to fail. This leads to the conclusion that the death of Jesus and its ensuing model of heroic rescue cannot be upheld as the method of actuating either salvation, atonement, or the eschatological future. Feminist theologians have highlighted that this not only diminishes the horrific nature of Jesus' own death, but that it also holds the potential to oppress and disempower women on account of the feminisation of submissive suffering and the spiritualisation of a transcendent, omnipotent deity.

In light of such critiques, it seems legitimate for feminist theologians to question whether a unique, male, heroic Jesus should have any place in theology. Ruether, for example, questions whether a male saviour can save women (1998b, 81). Ruether asks this in response to the argument proposed by Gregory of Nazianzus, who although arguing for the humanity (as opposed to masculinity) of Jesus asserts that "what has not been assumed has not been healed" (as cited by Carbine, 2006, 91), and as such highlights by default the problems with positing a male saviour as the saviour of both men and women. Lisa Isherwood in her book *Introducing Feminist Christologies* further explains the consequence of such thinking, noting that "If Christ could not experience being female, then the question was raised as to whether the female state could be redeemed" (2001, 15). If Jesus only assumed maleness, and only saved what he assumed, then Ruether and Isherwood are right to question how and where women figure in such an understanding of salvation.

[22] The nature of this "realm" and its location in the future are concepts that will thoroughly be addressed later in this chapter.

Recalling the work of Mary Daly, we can see that she has provided perhaps the most radical challenge to this formulation of Jesus, rejecting as she does the maleness of God that is made manifest in Jesus and perpetuated by patriarchal theology. Daly problematises the particularity of Jesus, questioning what meaning passages such as Galatians 3.28 can truly have: if all are made "one in Christ Jesus", but Jesus is male, then this oneness, Daly suggests, is in fact maleness (1973, 5). The problem arises, for Daly, when the particular (male) person of Jesus is understood to be imbued with divine power to save both male and female. Again, this hints at the superiority of the male over the female whilst also suggesting that inclusivity may in fact be a guise for androcentrism by way of including or transforming all of creation into that which is male.[23] Daphne Hampson, in her book *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, adds further justification to the rejection of Jesus as the one-time unique saviour of humankind. She attributes her rejection to post-Enlightenment thinking, claiming that advances in knowledge render such particularity "untenable" (2001, 289). She goes on to argue that living in a globalised, multicultural world renders Christ's salvific uniqueness "impossible" (2001, 292). So for Hampson, belief in Jesus' particularity is epistemologically untenable and culturally unimaginable. Moreover, she deems the particularity of Jesus to be inseparable from Christianity (2001, 292), and yet if this particularity is as irreversibly problematic as Daly insists, then not only is the meaning of Jesus for women questioned, but so too is Christianity in its entirety.

[23] This will resurface in the suggestion (to be developed later in this chapter) that an incorporeal heavenly existence is far from an egalitarian existence, and potentially only validates that which is associated with the male. Such a critique of inclusivity will also be an important consideration for my thesis, as I intend to respond to the oppressive constructions of the eschatological future, and indeed of salvation, that have been noted here by exploring whether it is possible to construct a feminist eschatology that benefits from the inclusive model of universal salvation, or whether such inclusivity necessarily leads to homogenising, even masculinising, existences in the way suggested by Daly.

Still more problems with traditional understandings of salvation are presented by womanist theologians. Of primary concern here is the notion that Jesus actualises salvation *on behalf of* humanity. Afforded particular attention here is the substitutionary theory of atonement which envisions Jesus as taking a punishment upon himself that rightly belongs to humanity. Delores Williams's text *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (1993) is crucial here. Williams brings to light the experiences and perspectives of some African-American women, and draws parallels between concepts of substitutionary atonement and some African-American women's experiences of forced surrogacy. She notes that for many African-American women the experience of surrogacy was one in which "slave women were forced to stand in place of white women and provide sexual pleasure for white male slave owners" (Williams, 1993, 67). These African-American women, then, were made substitutes for white women just as Jesus, in substitutionary models of atonement, was given as a substitute for humanity.[24] As such, Williams's contention is that this image of Jesus is far from salvific and instead potentially justifies such abuse of women. In light of this, it is evident that any model of the eschatological process understood as atonement, here framed as the substitutionary necessity of Jesus' death, offers justification for the particular oppression experienced by some African-American women.

Throughout this assessment, inference has been made to feminist perspectives that critique the framing of divine power as a power which overcomes sin and death. This signifies an aspect of feminist receptions of traditional constructions of the eschatological process which lead into later engagements with constructions of the content of eschatology, though a brief exploration is also relevant here. Brock

[24] Womanist perspectives, along with other liberation perspectives from women, such as those from *mujerista* theologians, are also crucial in thinking about the time of the eschaton, thus they will be thoroughly engaged with and explored later in this chapter.

challenges the very features of life that Jesus is purported to overcome; namely, sin and death. She writes that "The death of Jesus becomes a way to life that transcends our maternal birth by rebirth through the father's grace" (1995, 90). The salvific process is here understood to be one which remedies the material and maternal birth through the spiritual and paternal death and re-birth of Jesus. Mary Daly offers a similar view, arguing that such an understanding of eternal life, when coupled with the patriarchal insistence on God being named as "father" (1973, 13), suggests an exit from the mother and a return to the father (1973, 24). This infers that the power of birthing that some women experience is usurped by humanity's protological origin in and eschatological destination to God as male and father (cf. Zappone, 1991, 125; Samuelsson, 2009, 76). Still, Jantzen again provides the most insightful voice in the discussion; she explains that "It is only by this rebirth, which redoes or undoes the maternal birth, that it is possible to be a 'child of God,' to become divine" (1998, 143). Jantzen here highlights how the notion of being "born again" has the potential to continue the appropriation of maternal birth by suggesting again that one must partake in a process of departure from one's origins in a female body to a recreation in the salvific male body of Jesus.

Jantzen further suggests that the emphasis that is placed on Jesus conquering death perpetuates the historically male experience of mastering death. She expounds the dangers of this for women, noting that if fear of or fascination with death leads to the desire to master it then it will also lead to the desire to master all that it believes to be *reminders* of death: "women, bodiliness, and the earth to which we all return" (Jantzen, 1998, 131). Graham observes that such an imaginary "valorizes invulnerability, detachment, disembodied reason and longs for immortality" (2009a, 5) and, as Sjoo (1992, 12) further explains:

> Men who see birth as an obscenity and loathe having been born of a mere mortal woman, and therefore become subject to illness, old age and death, also see death as an enemy to be overcome.

Sjoo, then, links birth with death in such a way that exposes the patriarchal fear and hatred of both. Jantzen too suggests that the association of women with life is used to similarly associate her with death. She notes that such attitudes may also provide a justification for acts of dominance (1998, 132): if women's changing bodies are deemed to emphasise or remind one of finitude and temporality, and patriarchal theology desires to overcome that which is finite and temporal, then the dangers of traditional understandings of eschatology for women are obvious. Understanding the eschatological process as one of salvation from sin and death thus inherits problematic allusions to the divine overpowering and conquest of women's bodies.[25]

A further critique related to divine omnipotence is nestled within the critiques already noted; namely, that the eschatological process is one that is already known to God. Whether framed in terms of an already created utopia or an already completed salvation, the future's "alreadyness" necessarily implies that it is fully determined, and therefore fully known by God. The powers to create and to know have been shown to be rooted in models of divine incorporeality, which have been understood to be concomitant with depictions of God as impassible and immutable. Each of these definitions has been challenged by the feminist theologians noted, primarily on account of their diminution of freedom and relationality. Accordingly, these latter two features emerge as integral aspects of feminist responses and reconstructions.

Feminist Response: Divine Power is Involved and Intimate

Quite appropriately, the feminist theologians who were identified above as exposing the problems with the eschatological framing of God's omnipotence are also the ones who offer responses and reconstructions of God. In short, emphasis is placed on God's

[25] This is not to say that any reference to the overcoming of sin and death is impossible. As will be explored shortly, womanist theologians offer an alternative perspective. What is clear thus far, however, is that any rethinking of the eschatological process must not uphold the patriarchal unification and vilification of women's bodies and finite creation.

intimate involvement in the world. For Christ, Keller, and Jantzen there is a shared emphasis on God's presence to created beings. Brock adds another dimension to these contributions by locating God's power in community. Other voices also emerge as beneficial here: Mary Grey and Rosemary Radford Ruether, for instance, who both emphasise creaturely responsibility; and Sallie McFague who, along with Jantzen, presents a model of the world as God's body. Each of these thinkers seeks to remedy traditional allusions to a distant and disaffected God by constructing a God who authentically relates to genuinely free creatures. Sallie McFague, for instance, claims that a relational God is a thoroughly theological concept. God as Trinity, she writes, "is about relationship, about God with us in every way, at every level, in every moment" (2001, 144). Relationality then, for McFague, is a significant part of the nature of God. She has thus sought to reclaim the centrality of relationality, and elsewhere she observes that:

> We are all, men and mountains, children and caterpillars, women and wheat, intrinsically, internally, and thoroughly relational to the core. We humans are not solitary individuals who have occasional relations (when we feel like it) with other people, the natural world, and God (1997, 8).

In addition to highlighting the centrality of relationality in God, then, McFague also argues that it typifies creation. In concurrence with this, Marjorie Suchocki surmises that relationality is "fundamental to all existence" (1983). Relationality is thus seen to be intrinsic to both God and creation, such that its reclamation is seen to provide a more complete understanding of both. Moreover, it mitigates the devaluation of women, given the traditional connection made between women and relationality and the trivialisation of both.

In line with this, Carol Christ has based her reconfiguring of God on a similar appraisal of relationality, claiming that "Goddess/God is the most related of all beings" (2003, 46). It is worth noting here that Christ does not frame God's power as identical to creaturely power. In positing Goddess/God as the "most related of all beings", Christ

retains some level of distinction between God and creation. That God's power is necessarily and unequivocally relational, though, means that for Christ, this distinction is not constructed on the basis of God's ability to fix or force creation (2003, 52 and 90). Rather, divine power is understood by Christ to be manifest in divine *presence*, which, she contends, is both persuasive and sympathetic. Christ writes that Goddess/God has the power to transform suffering, for example, "through understanding it and attempting to persuade the individual not to cause unnecessary suffering to others" (2003, 134). Thus for Christ, God's presence is God's power, and this intimacy and immediacy is capable of transforming suffering not through solving or eradicating it but by feeling its effects and coaxing one away from its causes. However, Brock (1995, 34), with Keller in agreement (1995, 197) exposes a problem with this, for she notes that:

> Persuasion is the most reliable form of power from the standpoint of the possessor because it runs the least risk of arousing opposition from the power subject. Nonetheless, persuasion still connotes possession of power by an actor who attempts to get his or her own way.

Persuasion thus appears to be an unacceptable framing of divine power for it casts God as one who operates through manipulation and deceit in a unilateral expression of control and oppression. It seems that Christ would actually also reject this understanding of divine power, though, for in a recent article she expounds and concurs with Charles Hartshorne's rejection of coercion. She writes that "The power of a relational God is not the power to coerce, but the power to inspire or persuade individuals to act in their own best interests and in the best interests of other individuals in the universe" (2013). Given her framing of divine power as relational, Christ must, then, mean something other than coercion in her reference to persuasion. Persuasion may, for Christ, mean a conversational negotiation in which the divine attempts to convince beings-in-relation toward certain actions and away from others. This is a power which operates by entering into relationships with creation, not to determine their actions but rather to influence and inspire them.

Christ makes it clear that this should not, however, be understood to pertain to divine self-curtailment; that is, the curtailing of a limitless power in order to relate to creation. Rather, she suggests that divine power is actually, in essence, limited power as it is always relational. Christ writes that "Goddess cannot be omnipotent, because an omnipotent Goddess logically cannot be in relationship to other individuals who also have a degree of freedom and power" (2013). Thus, Christ outrightly rejects any allusions to omnipotence in God, even if that omnipotence is curtailed in favour of relationships. She argues that omnipotence is neither appropriate nor possible to assign to a God who is relational. Moreover, this relationality does not need omnipotence; it is not a relationality that seeks to do all for or know all about the one to whom it relates. Rather, Christ centralises presence, which she frames as divine intimacy with creation. As such, Christ upholds (though modifies) a model of omnipresence whilst rejecting depictions of omnipotence and omniscience.[26]

Many feminist theologians view divine omnipresence as being indicative of God's involvement in and with creation. As noted, both Grace Jantzen and Sallie McFague offer a construction of the world as God's body in order to illustrate this. In her 1988 article "The World as God's Body", McFague presents three defining features of this metaphor: firstly, she claims that it affirms embodiment, even though God's body is not deemed to be identical to ours. Rather, she writes, "The world is the bodily presence, a sacrament of the invisible God" (1988, 672). Presence is again emphasised, and this is understood to be mediated by and manifest in God's incarnation in the world. This has implications for how divine knowledge is conceived of: Jantzen frames divine knowledge as intimate understanding (1984a, 83), and this is here shown to be predicated not only on God's presence to creation, but on a specifically *embodied*

[26] There is yet more support provided for a modification of the doctrine of divine omnipresence from thinkers such as Soskice, Suchocki, and Jantzen. Each see a model of relational presence as being capable of speaking more authentically and accurately about God. The views of each of these thinkers will be addressed more critically and substantially in Chapter Two.

presence. In confirmation of the concern in the wider feminist arena to affirm embodied experiences in epistemology, as noted in the Introduction, God in this model emerges as one whose epistemology hinges on an embodied, experiential, and relational closeness to creation.[27]

McFague's second definition is concerned with the practicality of salvation; she notes that a God who is embodied in the world calls us to care for both bodies and the world. "Salvation", she claims, "would be a social, political and economic matter and not just a matter of the spirit's eternal existence" (1988, 672). God's embodied presence to creation thus propagates a pragmatic model of salvation, wherein creation is called to act responsibly and ethically for that body. This leads to McFague's third point, which emphasises the vulnerability of God and a degree of divine dependence on creation. In being embodied in the world, McFague contends that God is "at risk" insomuch as the destruction of the world at creation's own hands threatens to destroy God's very self (1988, 672). Here, McFague echoes Jantzen's contention that the annihilation of the world is synonymous with God's own annihilation (1984a, 143). Again, this has implications for constructions of the eschaton as characterised by an other-worldly existence, as will be explored in the next section of this chapter. What also seems to be emphasised here, though, is the framing of God as one whose existence in the world, indeed as the world, depends on creation to care for that world and prevent its destruction.[28]

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[27] Perhaps surprisingly, this aspect of the model, like the traditional models, again raises questions of human freedom. Jantzen acknowledges this, and concedes that "If the universe is God's body, and we are parts of the universe then we are part of God's body. But how then can we still be ourselves – persons with freedom?" (1984a, 150). Essentially, Jantzen is here recognising that if the world is God's self-expression then we too are God's self-expression. Moreover, our seemingly free self-expressions are also actually only God's self-expressions. Jantzen claims that this may be an unsolvable problem, but that it is not a new problem; in short, she argues that it is no more problematic than the traditional models that were previously interrogated. However, I will explore in Chapter Two whether a greater sense of divine-creation distinctiveness can be more successful at overcoming this problem.

[28] It should be noted that McFague does not deem such destruction or annihilation to be an actual possibility for, she contends, "God is not in our power to destroy" (1988, 672). Jantzen is

Jantzen and Keller both refer to a process of "becoming" divine in order to signify this dependence. Jantzen, in *God's World, God's Body* (1984a) posits "becoming" as the antithesis to "Being", with the latter being paralleled with divine immutability, indestructability, and immateriality. Being, then, she claims, "is immune not just from the ravages of time but from time itself" (1984a, 25). Thus, a God who already is all that God will ever be, rather than a God who becomes what God will be, is again identified with patriarchal constructions of divine disassociation and disaffectedness. Jantzen's later work, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion* (1998) develops her model of divine becoming which, in contrast to understandings of divine Being, refers to a "feeling and responsive" divine (Jantzen, 1998, 257). Dependence is thus understood to be, in fact, *interdependence*, such that the process of becoming divine is one of mutuality between creation and the divine. Keller elucidates this, and writes that "the divine and the world form the conditions of each other's becoming" (2003a, 227). This suggests that as we become divine, the divine becomes more lucid and accessible; essentially, more real. Jantzen refers to this as the divine being brought to life through our efforts to become divine (1998, 275). Thus, the divine is not a being who always already exists, but rather one whose existence depends on our own.[29]

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helpful in elucidating the possible reasoning behind McFague's response, as she claims that, just as human beings are not fully definable or describable by their physiology, "neither would the postulate that God's body is the universe mean that God is fully describable in exclusively physical terms" (1984a, 127). A distinction between God and creation is noted but this is not elaborated on. Although all metaphors are only partially descriptive, as McFague herself acknowledges (1988, 671), this acknowledgement could propel us to seek more ways to specify the nature of God and the divine-creation relation. A rethinking of God and creation in relation to the eschatological process may facilitate such specificity, and I will explore this in Chapter Two.

[29] Such notions of a parallel actuation of divine and creaturely becoming inform Chapter Two as I seek to specify the process of the eschaton as one which frees both God and creation. I divert from Jantzen and Keller, though, in claiming that if God is to be something other than a mere projection (as I shortly perceive these perspectives to claim), then this process cannot be an entirely mutual process.

Jantzen seeks to specify the nature of this divine becoming by appealing to Luce Irigaray's notion of an aspirational or ideal horizon of divinity (Jantzen, 1998, 12). Like Irigaray, Jantzen observes that this horizon has been constructed solely on male terms (1998, 14). Irigaray herself further infers that such androcentrism constructs women as serving the self-love of men (1993a, 63) or depending on men for their own self-love (1993a, 65).[30] The construction of the divine horizon on solely male terms is thus, again, critiqued for promoting a feminised model of servitude and dependence. In response, Jantzen proposes a divine horizon comprised of "our best and deepest aspirations, so that we are drawn forward to realize them" (1998, 92). The focus here, for Jantzen, is on reclaiming attributes that have been abstracted from divinity, primarily on account of them being associated with women (1998, 91). Jantzen thus takes the model of the world as God's body further than McFague; whereas, for McFague, God depended on creation in order to care for the world, Jantzen posits even the very existence of the divine as being dependent on creation.

This remodelling, whilst explicitly contradicting traditional models of God, ultimately appears to frame God as little more than an object of self-projection. Jantzen's earlier work seems to retain more of a distinction between God and creation than in *Becoming Divine*; in *God's World, God's Body,* Jantzen claims that "God can cope with more than we can" (1984a, 84), and also that "as creator and sustainer, no creature exists or has autonomy except from [God]" (1984a, 153). Here, it seems that Jantzen understands God as the creator rather than the creation of self-projection, as suggested in *Becoming Divine.* Thus, Jantzen's earlier work appears to uphold a distinction between God and creation. This is a necessary retention, for without this distinction the destruction that McFague and, in her earlier work, Jantzen, posited as impossible becomes not only

[30] Irigaray here posits that female self-love has been made elusive by traditional constructions of God. There is a need to examine both God and self-love, then. I will argue that the reconstruction of God pursued in Chapter Two enables a rethinking of self-love, which will be a feature of Chapter Four.

possible but probable. God is no longer able to do anything other than what we ourselves are able to do, and so becomes merely the receptacle for our destructive or sustaining behaviours; suffering the former and appreciating the latter. Moreover, whilst this model's focus on aspirations encourages us to think of the future, the actualisation of this future is ever-elusive, as the language of "horizon" indeed implies.

Despite these challenges, the remodelling of God as embodied in the world remains beneficial. Not only does it address traditional models of God by emphasising divine presence and relationality, but it also critiques the diminution of creaturely freedom and responsibility. This was implied in the third aspect of McFague's model, and she elaborates by claiming that "The model of the world as God's body encourages responsibility and care for the vulnerable and oppressed" (1988, 673), just as in 1 Corinthians 12.12-31 care is promoted for the "weaker", "less honourable", and "less respectable" members of the body. Indeed, if the world *is* God's body then *all* members of creation warrant and are worthy of care, especially the "vulnerable and oppressed". This is a valuable contribution as it not only depicts God's presence in the world but also signifies divinely-inspired action in and responsibility for the world.

Feminist Response: Redemption through Community

One way in which feminist theologians have sought to articulate creaturely responsibility is by reconstructing redemption. Traditional formulations of redemption carry many of the same problems as traditional understandings of eschatology, and Mary Grey acknowledges that redemption has overtones of guilt and self-negation on account of its supposed explanation in atonement doctrines (1989, 1). Nevertheless, feminist theologians have sought to "re-image" redemption and "redress injustices by suggesting alternative ways of understanding the power that saves and heals us" (Goudey, 1990, 673). Grey, for example, claims that redemption can be rethought in

terms of the goal, process, and method of achieving wholeness amongst and unity with *all of creation* (1989, 4).[31] That this is understood to be a process which includes and is for all of creation (as opposed to being the one-time action of God through Jesus) infers a sense of community and interconnectivity.

Rosemary Radford Ruether's model of redemption similarly emphasises community. Her article "Redemptive Community in Christianity" claims that the task of redemption is to remove the restrictions of androcentrism and work toward a vision of liberation and reconciliation that is "extended to the community of created being around us on which humans interdepend for their survival" (1991, 229). Thus, for Ruether, shared responsibility and interdependence are integral to the process of redemption. Emphasising responsibility, in this understanding, reclaims true community, the basis of which, Mary Grey contends, is the relational interconnectedness of humanity and the earth (1989, 40). Moreover, Grey claims that both humanity and the earth share a hunger for redemption (Grey, 1989, 39) which is constantly faced with the possibility of fulfilment, as "God is always offering redemptive possibilities to the world" (Grey, 1989, 35). These possibilities, according to Grey, are only realised and made manifest by creation's active response, thus again signifying God's dependence on creation: if creation fails to respond, the possibilities for redemption remain only possibilities (Grey, 1989, 35). Redemption in Grey's understanding, then, cannot hinge on "waiting for better things in another world," or indeed *from* another world, because this removes the need for shared responsibility for healing and "building right relation here and now" (Grey, 1989, 89). One way in which feminist theologians have destabilised traditional understandings of redemption, then, is by prioritising shared and communal responsibility.

[31] Grey incorporates an ecological consciousness with her understanding of redemption, thus she is also beneficial to this chapter's later considerations of the content of the eschaton.

Rita Nakashima Brock also frames redemptions in terms of the concurrent experience of community and interconnectivity. This "reveals erotic power" (1995, 62) which, Brock claims, is not only divine but is the very "Heart of the Universe" (1995, 46).[32] This echoes readings of the world as God's body and adds that, alongside interdependence, interconnection is not only integral to God but is indicative of God's power. Moreover, that this interconnection is understood to occur both within Godself and between God and creation means that divine power is here framed as *shared* power, as previously inferred by Grey. Power, in this understanding, is not to be possessed and used but rather generated in relationships. Brock's reading of the haemorrhaging woman's receipt of power in Mark 5.25-34, for instance, suggests that she does not see Jesus creating or controlling such power but rather as sharing and, indeed, being created by it (1995, 52).[33] In line with this, she claims that power "must reside in connectedness and not in single individuals" (1995, 52). Mercedes develops this by reading "Christ" as "chrism", and explaining that "Christ" refers to the "anointed one" whilst "chrism" speaks of the "anointing process". This is a process, Mercedes claims, that "always requires community" for it consists of something being "done by one to another" and, she continues, "the process is ongoing, never freezing static on one body as the once-and-for-all body of Christ" (2014, 234). Heyward similarly frames redemptive power as connectedness, and infers that such power is key to realising not only creaturely redemption but the very redemption of God (1989, 18). This echoes the earlier presentations of God's dependence on creation and helps to highlight another

[32] Understandings of erotic power can assist us in radically rethinking the powers which effect the realisation of the eschaton, and are engaged with in more depth in Chapter Two, where I rethink divine power in relationships, and Chapter Four where I consider how we may embody erotic power in our present relations.

[33] Brock is paying particular attention here to Mark 5.27-30 in which the haemorrhaging woman "had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?'".

key aspect of these remodellings of God, namely the rejection of any divinely-actuated finality. Heyward (1989, 92) writes that:

> We do not move toward a final, static, resolution of our relational fears and tensions. To the contrary, our power draws us into our beginnings – into the heart of our creation/creativity, into our relatedness.

For these theologians, the emphasis on interconnectivity and interdependence in the divine-creation relation means that worth is placed in the ever-processual experience of entire communities, and not just one individual, developing and sustaining relationships of erotic power.

It is evident that thinkers such as Brock are not denying the importance of Jesus; rather, Brock is here reinterpreting his importance in light of her understanding of erotic power. The implication of such reframings of power is that the image of Jesus as the unique saviour is rejected. As such, Jesus' maleness is no longer deemed problematic as it is not the sole receptacle of or agent for redemption. Instead redemptive activity is flung wide open for the participation of all. Again, the emphasis is on creaturely responsibility. In a similar vein, and in continuation of her remodelling of the world as God's body, Sallie McFague reinterprets the incarnation by emphasising its communal and cosmic occurrence. That is, she deems the incarnation to be God's presence in the entire universe as opposed to one being alone (1987, 62). In light of this, she questions (1987, 70):

> What if […] the 'resurrection of the body' were not seen as the resurrection of particular bodies that ascend, beginning with Jesus of Nazareth, into another world, but as God's promise to be with us always in God's body, our world?

McFague's vision, then, is of a resurrection to "our world" (much like Ruether's idea of *metanoia* or conversion to hoping in and for this world (2002, 313-315), which will be explored momentarily) with emphasis on God's commitment to and inseparability from the earth. These contributions are particularly helpful as they retain Jesus' significance

whilst offering solutions to problematic constructions of his singular role in achieving salvation.

Human activity is here honoured, as these feminist theologians envision an endless future that is infinitely open to the influences of creation, as opposed to it being closed and already created by an omnipotent God. Christ (2003, 195) achieves this by emphasising human effort, and God's sustenance of and support for that effort. Whereas traditional perspectives appeared to preserve God's knowledge of the future by suggesting that creation has no way of affecting that future, Christ here maintains that humans *do* impact the future and therefore God cannot fully know the future. The future is here envisioned as a world createable by humans working with the divine. Such an articulation is typical of many feminist perspectives on redemption, hence Christ's claim that process thought is most compatible with the "feminist vision" (2003, 40). Indeed, emphasising creaturely responsibility is deemed to be necessary in order to counteract the previous ideas of God realising the eschatological process alone. A God who is involved in creation, then, suggests a God who can only achieve redemption through the cooperation of creation. These contributions succeed in emphasising human responsibility for redemption and thus serve to remedy the passivity or acquiescence that was detected with proposals for an already created and known future that is assured by an omnipotent and omniscient God through the heroic death of Jesus.

Although many feminist theologians have rejected the centrality of Jesus, as noted, there are some who instead seek to reimagine what his centrality in redemption may mean. Delores Williams, for example, still sees salvation as being realised by Jesus but claims this is achieved through "Jesus' life of resistance and by the survival strategies he used to help people survive" (1993, 164). She goes on to specify that Jesus' life is

salvific and informs our own salvation through relationality; that is, through living "peacefully, productively and abundantly in relationship" (1993, 167). This signals an important aspect of the discussion; namely, that despite the problems noted with traditional understandings of Jesus, many women have nevertheless found him to be a liberating figure. It is evident, then, that not all feminist theologians wish to discount the unique significance of Jesus.

Indeed, in addition to centralising Jesus' life, further examples highlight some of the ways in which Jesus' suffering and death have been rethought by feminist theologians. Particularly relevant here are rethinkings of *kenosis*. Although, as Chau rightly notes, "certain feminists seem to find *kenosis* abhorrent since it appears to be a concession to, perhaps even collusion with, the sinful reality of the world" (2012, 9), there are some who attempt to think differently. Indeed, Webb notes that whilst thinkers such as Mercedes, Farley, and Copeland retain the conviction that Jesus' death was not necessary, they also see in his suffering a God who "meets us where we are" in such a way that restores us and orients us to others (2012, 199). Coakley's contributions are also significant here, for she views *kenosis* in terms of "a regular and willed *practice* of ceding and responding to the divine" (2003, 27). Coakley sees silent prayer as the most vibrant manifestation of this, as it embodies the kind of "power and vulnerability" that gives space "for God to be God" and in so doing enables us to be "properly 'empowered'" (2003, 27). Allowing God to be God, in this understanding, is not a state of submission to a dominant being, for God is understood in similar terms. Mercedes, for instance, speaks of the self-giving power of God in terms of God's power "for *us*" (as cited by Webb, 2012, 199) whilst Papanikolaou argues that *kenosis* refers to the reciprocity of self-giving that constitutes the "relations between the persons of the Trinity" (2003, 47). Thus, a *kenotic* relationship with the divine infers an openness to a God who is both reciprocally open to us and inherently open within Godself. For these

thinkers, then, *kenosis* is not understood to be the obliteration of the self in favour of the other, or the complete depletion of the self at the behest of the other. Rather, it is framed as an act of being open, vulnerable, and self-giving toward another who responds with reciprocity. Papanikolaou (2003, 58-59) expresses a similar perspective, writing that:

> *Kenosis* is not primarily self-sacrifice, but a state of being that liberates *eros*, the desire to be in relation with the other. It is a precondition for relations of love and freedom, the only context in which the self is truly given.

*Kenosis* is thus understood to be a loving act of relationality that empowers and restores all within that relationship. Jesus' death, then, is not *kenotic* in a sense of submitting to overwhelming forces of oppression; rather, it is an openness to sharing in the experiences and indeed the sufferings of others in ways that are as empathetic as they are empowering.

Baudzej offers yet more support for reinterpreting Jesus' significance, and puts forward a consistent case for both the historic and contemporary significance of Jesus for women. She traces this from medieval theology which, it is claimed, emphasised Jesus' *bodiliness* as opposed to his *maleness* (2008, 77), right up to her own view that Jesus in fact refused to partake in relationships of dominance and submission, and instead challenged male supremacy (2008, 84). Understandings of *kenosis* again resurface in such readings: Ruether, for instance, suggests that Jesus' maleness can be comprehended as the "kenosis of patriarchy" (2002, 136-137). This is rooted in Ruether's observation that Jesus proclaimed a reversal of the social order, "a new reality in which hierarchy and dominance are overcome as principles of social relations" (2002, 136). Thus, for Ruether, Jesus indicates the self-emptying of patriarchy by embodying maleness and proceeding to usurp or "strip off" the "traditional masculine imagery" of messiahship (Ruether, 2002, 135). Burrows observes that this is not a new perspective: reading Bernard of Clairvaux, she notes his

point that "God's 'erotic power' which we meet in the passionate encounter with Jesus our 'tender lover' requires of men a gender inversion" (1998, 489). Of course, there are questions to be asked here concerning how gender is being defined, but for now we can see that moves were and are being made to rethink the significance of Jesus with regards to gender. Indeed, Althaus-Reid and Isherwood observe a similar attitude in some Indian women, explaining that "It is the Christ who as a male, acted against 'male culture' who gives hope to many women in India" (2007, 83) and moreover that "Jesus is the male advocate par excellence and his gender is less of a problem than his colonial crown" (2007, 84). This is not to say that Jesus' maleness has not been a problem, but that different issues arise for these Indian women. This suggests both another problem (that is, the westernised construction of Jesus) and a potential solution to the problematising of Jesus' maleness (that is, understanding his maleness to be subversive). Each of the perspectives noted here highlight that feminist theologians have found cause and confirmation for a rethinking of Christology in terms of embodied relationality and vitality, and bodily integrity in the face of injustice or oppression. In this sense, they can offer sustenance and support for a rethinking of eschatology along similar lines.

An emphasis on incarnation is thus crucial to these thinkers' understandings of Jesus, and the embodiment of Christ in the subversive actions of Jesus are seen to be indicative, if not paradigmatic, of the impotence of patriarchy and the centrality of relational embodiments. We can detect a similar perspective in the work of Lisa Isherwood, who speaks of a "radical incarnation" that is founded on empowerment and *dunamis*. Isherwood (2010a, 166) writes that:

> This is the concept spoken of by Jesus in the gospels when he rejects 'authority over' and urges those who come after him to claim their empowerment to live in vulnerability, mutuality and relationality.

For Isherwood, then, Jesus displays what it means to live lives that are empowered and empowering; this, Isherwood argues, conveys the "profound reality" of redemptive relationality (2010a, 165). Such a view is similarly evident in many other liberation theologies, for whom the incarnation models ways of living that are concerned with relationality and justice. Nichole R. Phillips, for instance, claims that the incarnation "reflects the shape of and embodies the spirit of humanity". Reading Wendy Farley's assertion that the incarnation "awakens us to the power of the human form" to bear the divine, Phillips notes that humanity can "astoundingly and ably carry on the work of Kingdom building through service to neighbors and friends" (2011, 345). For Phillips, then, the incarnation necessarily has eschatological connotations and implications, and can reveal to us the ways in which we may make this "Kingdom" or this future a reality now.

However, such perspectives are not representative of all considerations of Jesus, and despite their merits they continue to be problematic. Firstly, as Irigaray notes, an emphasis on bodiliness cannot escape the fact that this "is always sexually specific" (as cited by Jantzen, 1998, 16) so if one is genuinely to appreciate Jesus' bodiliness one must necessarily recognise his maleness, meaning that a focus on the former cannot quell the problems of the latter. Even if Jesus' maleness is seen to be subversive, this nevertheless potentially implies that only a male can subvert patriarchy. Indeed, whilst the perspectives offered by Althaus-Reid and Isherwood must be appreciated and respected, it is nevertheless important to be aware that attaching saving significance to Jesus' maleness, even if in a subversive manner, potentially perpetuates the patriarchal construction of the male as superior. As such, Williams's earlier noted contribution, which retains the locating of salvation in Jesus, returns us to some of the problems noted concerning the construction of divine power as singular and unilateral, thus suggesting that perspectives which appreciate but decentralise Jesus may be more

beneficial. Amongst these perspectives, Mercedes' view is especially creative, as she retains the particularity of Christ without restricting this to the one person of Jesus (2014, 236). As noted, she interprets Christ as "chrism" and writes that:

> While chrism always marks particular skin in particular times and places, and indeed sanctifies those historical particularities, those bodies and contexts cannot claim a uniqueness as *the* Christ without closing down the ongoing vivacity of Christ's movement in the world, of the power chrism's momentum and transfer.

Again, this highlights how perspectives that decentralise Jesus whilst retaining Christological values may be the most successful at communicating a relational understanding of both creation and the divine and, indeed, creation's participation in divine life. Williams does show, though, that it is possible to hold together an emphasis on connection and relationship with a sense of God having a degree of power to assure or realise these. As such, she will be helpful to my constructive attempts in Chapter Two.

Locating this Thesis

Whether or not feminist theologians choose to centralise Jesus, it is clear that their Christologies contain much of benefit to this thesis. Their various emphases on shared power and responsibility, embodied relationality and vitality, and, God's *kenotic* love for creation, are all values that this thesis finds merit in and will similarly seek to uphold. Moreover, it will develop them, particularly in Chapter Two, in order to rethink the process of the eschaton as one that is actuated through divine-creation relations of erotic power. Thus, the values communicated by rethinking Christ as capable of being incarnate in all of creation through the elements noted are of benefit to this thesis's remodelling of eschatology on the bases of embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality.

This thesis will not, however, engage specifically or explicitly with feminist reformulations of Christology in Chapter Two, primarily out of a concern that models of *God* in particular, although of course not separable from understandings of Christ, are most problematic in and for understandings of eschatology.[34] Indeed, despite the evident merits of the views noted, it is also apparent that feminist theologians have made little attempt to use their remodellings of God to reconfigure eschatology. A relational God and eschatological finality and futurity have, on the whole, been understood to be mutually-exclusive. There is, for example, limited exploration of whether God can have *more* power than creation without this being exercised in patriarchal manners and without this amounting to God possessing *all* power. Chapter Two, then, will attempt to hold divine-creaturely relationality together with a sense of eschatological finality, and thus contribute a new perspective to the debate. I will use feminist theological responses that emphasise both God's intimate involvement in the world and creaturely responsibility and freedom in order to rethink eschatology. Of course, the readings of the incarnation that were noted earlier can support such a task, and the values upheld in such readings will certainly be utilised in Chapter Two's constructive efforts.

Indeed, the Christological values noted are often used to remodel the nature of God, and this thesis upholds many of these models. Using these reformulations of divine nature in order to rethink eschatology is deemed to be a logical and necessary progression if the eschatological process is to be successfully extracted from the hands of patriarchal theology. Moreover, it is crucial if women are to be able to conceive of a future that no longer assigns them certain values and proceeds to devalue them through that

[34] Nor will Christology feature explicitly in Chapters Three and Four, out of a concern to focus clearly and specifically on creating new models of the content and the time of the eschaton. This is not to say that feminist formulations of Christology are overlooked: some of the values upheld in these Christologies, such as the embodiment of erotic power, are utilised consistently throughout the thesis.

assignation. Instead, an eschatological process rethought on the grounds of embodied relationality can value what has been associated with women and proceed to include all of creation in the relational process of realising the eschaton.

Furthermore, the readings of erotic power that were earlier alluded to are beneficial in remedying many of the problems with traditional modellings of divine power as aloof, unilateral, and domineering. As such, they inform my rethinking of divine power in Chapter Two, wherein I will emphasise divine relational intimacy and presence. Furthermore, their ability to specify the nature of creaturely responsibility and therein affirm interconnectedness and community is indispensible.[35] Thus, they are also helpful in informing my reconstruction of the content of eschatology in Chapter Three, and my thoughts concerning the realisation of the eschaton in the present in Chapter Four. Having said this, McFague's contribution helps us to see why, despite their importance and value, the predominantly presentist readings of relational power that typify the responses noted above may be insufficient. If all of creation is indeed interconnected, then McFague infers that the permanent loss of even one member becomes "unbearable" (1988, 673). Although McFague is here calling for us to dwell on the specialness of creation in order to fuel our action to care for it, her assertion can also provide justification for a rethinking of eschatology. If we are to uphold the remodelling of God as intimately involved in creation, and the reframing of divine power as interdependent and interconnected, then the permanent loss of any member(s) of creation would profoundly affect not only ourselves but also God. Moreover, the lack of an alternative future for those members of creation who are lost means that any relationship with them is ultimately lost. An eschatology constructed on the basis of divine-creation relation, though, may be able to affirm both the features

[35] There are some problems to be noted with responsibility, though, for it implies that we are all capable of contributing to creating this interconnectivity and community. Critiques of notions of contribution are, then, thoroughly addressed in Chapter Two.

central to feminist theological reconstructions *and* offer a more full experience of relationality in the future. Before such development, though, two additional but associated problems must be addressed; namely, what the tradition has proposed concerning what eschatological existence looks like (the "content" of the eschatological future) and when it will be realised (the "time" of the eschaton).

**Content: Eschatology and Immateriality**

Assumptions about the God who assures the process of eschatology have implications for assertions made about the content of that eschatology. We remember that Christ observed a tendency within the Christian tradition to frame perfection as non-relationality (Christ, 2003, 35). Separation from relationships rests on an assumption of separation from bodies, as Jantzen inferred earlier. Keller expounds this, commenting that "Free of time, the self will again reflect the image of God, in which it was created. Or rather, in which men were created" (1996a, 102). Thus, the suggestion that perfection amounts to a disembodied experience of timelessness devalues the changing and temporal embodied lives of *all* of creation. Not only this, it constructs eschatological bodies on values associated with the male and so, again, frames the female as inferior and iniquitous. In short, then, it is argued that if the future is created by a disembodied (and therefore non-relational) God then the future which that God creates will necessarily be corresponsive. Traditional models of eschatology are therefore problematized for basing their constructions on the negation of aspects of life which theology has associated with women; embodiment in general and its specific characterisation in terms of material and temporal fluidity. Such negation is likewise used to devalue the body of the earth; feminist theological critiques are thus directed at the devaluation of both, whilst responses seek to reclaim the two. The model of the world as the body of God is understandably relevant here again, then. The main focus of the critiques that will be noted here is the construction of the "end" in the eschaton

and the depiction of this as an end to embodied and earthen processes and existences. Feminist theologians have responded by articulating a reclamation and affirmation of the embodied processes of life, particularly as experienced by women in their present lives.

Problem: A Static, Spiritual Existence

The most ubiquitous and substantial critique to be noted here is that which is levelled against the Christian tradition's unification of women and materiality. Rosemary Radford Ruether considers the patriarchal identification of women with materiality in a particularly eschatological context. Her most comprehensive assessment of this can be found in her seminal book *Sexism and God-Talk* (2002). Here, Ruether benefits greatly from Sherry B. Ortner's article, 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture' (2001, 61-80) which attempts to explain the reasons behind the identification of women with nature, or matter. Ortner surmises that women's bodies are thought to be "more involved more of the time with species life" (2001, 66) on account of their menstruation and birthing. Carol Christ (2008, 162) substantiates Ortner's claim, noting that:

> Because the body through which we are born into the changing physical world is female, it is nearly inevitable that femaleness will become symbolic of the changing world and the body that must be transcended. In dualistic visions, the process of the changing female body including menstruation, pregnancy, birth, nursing, and menopause cannot be affirmed as sacred or as reflecting the sacred.

Thus, traditional dualistic thinking posits that the female body which births through and into change is antithetical to a changeless divinity. Ruether notes, however, that such reasoning has not always been explicitly evident. She observes that in Hebrew thought, women were not ontologically linked with materiality and, more specifically, the earth. The connection was made only (though, for Ruether, not excusably) on the basis of a shared subjugation (2002, 66). She claims that the more explicit identification of the two is attributable to the advent of Greek thought; that is, the Platonic dichotomisation of spiritual transcendence and material embodiment, and the

attribution of the former to the male and the latter to the female (2002, 67). This solidified the identification of women with matter, she claims, as it made radical the dualism of male with spirit and female with nature that was subtly present in Hebrew thought. Ruether claims that this is a *radical* shift as man came to be understood as partaking in "the same transcendent status as God, outside of and above nature" (2002, 67). Platonic thought, then, introduced the dualistic idea that the male is to be associated with that which is transcendent and spiritual on account of him being the authentic incarnation of the soul. The female, on the other hand, was seen to represent the corruption (and corruptibility) of the soul; essentially, the feminisation and materialisation of the previously "authentic" masculinised soul (Ruether, 1979, 48). Models of divinity are thus said to have been constructed on the basis of, and have therefore given value to, only that which has been identified as male. Furthermore, the inference made by Ruether is that such models make assertions about what is of *ultimate* value; namely, the endurance of the male-defined soul at the expense of the female-defined body.

Ruether later traces the continued influence and appropriation of such ideas in Christian thought, claiming that Gregory of Nyssa, for example, identified the female body with mortality, and mortality with that which is "fundamentally unnatural" and undeserving of a place in resurrected life (2002, 208-9). Furthermore, she cites Augustine and Jerome and, whilst conceding that they denied male-only salvation, she maintains that they were nevertheless clear about emphasising the "eschatological 'spiritual body'" (2002, 209). Thus, Ruether suggests that whilst Platonic ideas were not used indiscriminately by the tradition (Ruether notes that the pre-existence of the soul and reincarnation were, on the whole, rejected), their influence on Christian thought is undoubtable (Ruether, 2008, 331). Ruether provides a reading here of the dualistic association of women with materiality that is shared by many other feminist

theologians, such as McCulloch (2002, 21), Primavesi (1991, 143), and Christ (1987, 93). Amongst these, Ruether's perspective is most comprehensive as she shows that not only have women and the earth been united by a shared subjugation, but they have also been exclusively assigned attributes that are deemed to be either hindrances to or absent from transcendent and spiritual existence. Subsequently these attributes, she suggests, are used to justify this subjugation, all in the name of prioritising that which is identified with the male. The consequences of this for the earth will be explored in the next section; for now it seems that there is a common and widely-accepted articulation of eschatology as a transcendent and spiritual existence. Ruether explains that such understandings suggest that female flesh is "inimical to eternal life" (1998a, 138; cf. Stefaniw, 2010, 353 and Grey, 2009b, 198). It seems, then, that the simultaneous patriarchal association of women with matter and construction of eschatology as immaterial locks women's bodies in a patriarchal logic which fashions them as antithetical to eschatological existence.[36]

A more explicit but less discussed dimension of such thought is the implication that women must become men (as opposed to incorporeal, although this too, as has been seen, potentially denotes maleness alone) in order to be saved. Ruether again provides a comprehensive assessment of this, reiterating the impact of Plato's concept of the male being the authentic incarnation of the soul. In light of this, she notes the more literal claim that women's bodies must become, in some way, like male bodies if they are to claim a place in redemption (1979, 48). Ruether acknowledges the ambiguous

[36] Interestingly, Graham detects similar sentiments in philosophies of technology; namely, in "transhumanism" which, she writes, strives to "enhance human intellectual powers and improve physical and psychological capabilities" (2006, 164). Graham goes on to note that these technologies express a form of "realized eschatology" wherein "the continuity of individuals and the human species is equated with the continuation of consciousness rather than any notion of embodied selfhood" (2006, 165). This "secular doctrine of humanity" draws upon theological models of divinity and humanity in such a way that "humans must seek to overcome those elements of their nature that are not divine (mortality, embodiment, contingency)" in order to achieve true divinity (2006, 172). Graham's observations highlight the pervasive and enduring impact of the theological perspectives noted here, and they also make inference to why attending to embodiment is a pertinent issue.

nature of this concept, explaining that some theologians traditionally understood this transformation to be a biological change from a female body to a male body (1998a, 138), whereas others imagined the curbing, and ultimately the rejection, of female sexuality as a necessary component of women's redemption (Ruether, 2008, 332; cf. 1998a, 138-9). Regardless of such disagreements, the overarching goal in both understandings, she claims, appears to be to make women more like the perfected soul, which, it is implied, entails a move away from the female and towards the male; away from matter and towards spirit.

Blossom Stefaniw's article "Becoming Men, Staying Women" (2010) clarifies and confirms Ruether's claims. She makes reference to *The Gospel of Thomas*, in which Jesus is said to claim that he will ensure Mary's place in redemption by making her male. This is made explicit in verse 114 which asserts that "For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven". Stefaniw argues that inclusion in salvation, for Mary, necessarily means the exclusion of her sex, such that "Mary is not included or accepted as a women, but is transformed and re-categorized as a man, and then accepted" (2010, 344; cf. Isherwood, 2001, 15). The oppression of women here is twofold as Stefaniw explains that women were to be seen as male in their spiritual life, and female in their social life. This meant that women were required to deny their womanhood in order to partake in redemptive communities, but simultaneously retain their "femaleness" socially, as this pertained to the way they should be treated (Stefaniw, 2010, 348). This, of course, simply reinforces the identification of the male with the infinite and redemptive, and the female with the finite and corruptible. Such contributions thus expose the tendency within traditional eschatological thought to pair the future with a denial of the female-identified body. The suggestion is that eschatology's reliance on such dualistic and essentialised constructions of male and

female bodies renders it meaningless. It fails to speak truthfully about both male and female bodies, but it does so by venerating the former and demeaning the latter.

There are some feminist theologians who contend that this denial of female embodiment is manifest no more so than in the patriarchal interpretation and valorisation of virginity. Ranke-Heinemann, for example, argues that emphasising Mary's virginity "[robs] her of her motherhood" by denying her the embodied experiences of conceiving, bearing, and birthing (1990, 342).[37] However, it is not only Mary's motherhood which is deemed to be discredited by a disproportionate focus on her virginity: Beattie (1999, 67) explains that the complexities of all women's experiences of their bodies are subsequently devalued by this. She asks:

> To what extent can Mary's body serve as a symbolic site which gives conceptual expression to the pain and pleasure of women's bodies, when her own body is symbolically pure and inviolate from any association with the normal bodily functions of the female sex?

For Beattie, then, patriarchal theology alienates Mary's body from all other women's bodies by attaching purity and sacredness to her virginal motherhood, and so placing impossible conditions on the way in which female bodies are to be valued. It is this impossibility, or inimitability, which Mary Daly claims has resulted in "all women essentially [being] identified with Eve" (1973, 81); the consequences of which will be outlined later in this chapter. Such attitudes towards Mary's virginity again defer attention away from any indicators of finitude and materiality in favour of a "redeemed" state which, according to the patriarchal understanding, rejects or ignores female embodiments and sexualities. Coupled with the perspectives noted earlier by Ruether and Stefaniw, it is evident that the acceptance of women into redeemed life, and moreover into a future heavenly realm, has been understood as hinging on the

[37] I attend to this implied theft of Mary's motherhood by suggesting an appraisal and appreciation of the interpretive value of some experiences of motherhood and birthing in Chapter Three. As later assessments will show, feminist theologians' attempts to rethink Mary will also prove helpful to my use of these experiences.

denial of all female bodies and the assumption of the spiritual and singular male body. The inimitability of Mary only compounds the presentation of female bodies as being inimical to redeemed life. This highlights the enduring and pervading justification that has been provided for the devaluation of female bodies and materiality in Christian models of perfect, ultimate, and therefore eschatological existence.

Some feminist theologians further claim that the patriarchal identification of women with materiality is not only problematic on a theoretical level, but that it also has specific, even dangerous, practical implications for women's bodies. Grace Jantzen, for example, exposes the fact that patriarchal theology united women and matter then proceeded to actively and violently vilify this unification. She writes that "The Church, having sown the wind in its teaching about women, was now reaping its whirlwind" (Jantzen, 1995, 270) with the witch hunts of the 16th century being a prime example of this. Jantzen charts these attitudes from the witch hunts to the more contemporary attitude of the "male scientist" who approaches nature and women in the same way; that is, "not with violence, but with patience and gallantry. Nevertheless" she claims, "it is clear that he will become the master" (1995, 276). Attempts to master and control nature and women, be it by force or manipulation, are thus identified as being primary consequences of the patriarchal association of women with matter. This mastery has manifest itself in constructions of eschatology as the final conquest over death; the earlier-noted identification of female bodies with mortality and the exclusion of both from constructions of "redeemed life" is again identified by feminist theologians as problematic. Jantzen (1998, 130), again, writes that:

> The preoccupation with death is matched by a fascination with other worlds, some other form of reality beyond the uncertainties of this present life, bound up as it is with the material body.

Jantzen goes on to explain that as a result of the fascination with other worlds, death becomes the definitive characteristic of life as opposed to it being one aspect of it

(1998, 132). Mortality, Jantzen argues, has been centralised, ensuring the marginalisation, and even in some cases such as those noted above, the vilification of life. This, she infers, is inextricably connected to eschatological ideas of an other-worldly afterlife. Indeed, even the language of "afterlife" seems to infer the abandonment of this life. Such a perspective seems to be manifest in Augustine's claim that "The city of God endures forever; in it no-one is born because no-one dies" (Augustine, 1950, 52). Some feminist theologians claim that this apparent rejection of, or escape from, mortality warrants a complete rejection of any models of the afterlife. Waschenfelder, for example, argues that "Negating the afterlife is one more essential corrective to those life-limiting habits of thought common to tradition-centred Christianity" (2010, 100). Whilst complete negation of an afterlife is an extreme standpoint and is not typical of all feminist contributions, there is substantial support for the idea that a focus on the afterlife limits the abundance of life available in the here and now.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, in her book *His Religion and Hers*, attempts to find a reason for such a centralisation of the afterlife. She exposes patriarchal theology's prioritisation of what were deemed to be historically male experiences of hunting and death over historically female experiences of birthing and life (as cited by Ruether, 2002, 197-8). Male experiences, we are told, were saturated with death and this resulted in a combination of fear of and fascination with death that ultimately led to the desire to "master" or transcend death. The challenge posed here, then, is that constructions of an afterlife centralise traditionally male experiences and seek to overcome or conquer that which is defined as female.

Further problems have been identified when considering traditional constructions of the eschaton as being characterised by sinlessness. This is exposed as problematic

when sin and human depravity are so often linked to women's bodies. Some feminist theologians note that women are said to be included in the blame for sin on account of their connection to, or solidarity with, Eve. One feminist theologian to have engaged extensively with this issue is Lisa Isherwood who recognises both the propensity for the tradition to discredit, and even demonise, Eve and subsequently all women (2001, 17), and the enduring effect of such constructions (2001, 28-9):

> Eve raises her head in many ways from some women referring to menstruation as 'the curse' to the government blaming single mothers for juvenile crimes and the national debt. Women have been encouraged to take on guilt, suffering and self-sacrifice, and this situation needs redeeming.

Isherwood's reference to menstruation further highlights how perceptions of women's bodies as changing and fluid have been used to make them culpable for their alignment with sin. For Isherwood, women continue to be imaged, with some even imaging themselves, in light of the patriarchal vilification of Eve. This internalisation of gendered oppression highlights the subtlety of patriarchal oppression, and Isherwood helps to expose the ways in which traditional constructions of Eve in particular have become embedded in some women's self-understandings. If these gendered understandings of sin are upheld and are coupled with an understanding of the resurrection as overcoming such sin, then the content of the eschaton again appears to be typified by a rejection of that which is associated with women.[38]

Problem: An Otherworldly Existence

Much in the same way that depictions of eschatological existence have been used to devalue women's bodies, feminist theologians have also highlighted the ways in which traditional models of eschatology also devalue the earth. The overriding contention here is that the eschatological prioritisation of other-worldly, future-oriented existence

[38] In light of this, Chapter Three will contend that a feasible and beneficial response will not deny the presence of change in women's bodies, and indeed in all bodies, but that it will and indeed must refuse to align this with depravity and debasement. Chapter Three also challenges some inferences made here to the tradition's assignation of sinfulness and the culpability for death to all women through Eve.

detracts attention and concern away from this world. Whilst many feminist theologians, as we have seen, would indeed agree with this critique of the afterlife, Mary Grey's contributions in *Struggling with Reconciling Hearts and Holding Fast to Our Dreams* (2009a) and *The Outrageous Pursuit of Hope* (2000) are particularly pertinent here. Grey's primary critique of patriarchal theological concepts of eschatology is that their other-worldly focus conveys the "deadly message" that "ultimately this earth does not matter" (2000, 10). Grey does not over-emphasise the severity of the issue: if this earth does not matter then issues to do with the environment are ignored, but so too are issues concerning challenging and changing oppressive structures. Looking to another world in the future then, for Grey, means that this world is at our disposal and our actions in it are meaningless. The diminution of human responsibility arises again. Moreover, the view that this world does not ultimately matter and a future other-worldly existence is the goal of humanity necessarily, it is argued, leads to an "earth-fleeing sentiment" whereby one's primary concern is escape from the earth (Waschenfelder, 2010, 91).[39] This is contrasted with appreciation of and respect for the earth, and with working towards the healing of this earth. Grey (2009b, 202) further explains that:

> For too long spirituality has been based on *contemptus mundi*, escape from the world, a privileging of the infinite over the finite and not on *amor mundi*, love of the world with full acceptance of the demands of embodied life.

Making the link with finitude and embodiment, and recalling patriarchal constructions of both, we can see inferences here to the tradition's simultaneous and associated desire to reject or escape from the earth body and women's bodies. Irigaray similarly notes that the "patriarchal order" is overly concerned with worlds beyond this one; both before birth and after death. In concurrence with Grey, Irigaray surmises from

[39] It is interesting to note that there is nothing in the literature that suggests the possibility of a positive understanding of escape, such as a sense of "escapism" offering a means of appreciating and coping in this world. This may be a way in which oppressed people can survive and even flourish in the midst of oppression. Such survival, though not framed in terms of "escapism", is attended to later in this chapter and resurfaces throughout this thesis.

this that "the world we have now" and, we may add, that which is associated with women, is subsequently denied value (Irigaray, 1993b, 27). As such, the desire to flee from this present world is exposed here as continuing and confirming the identification of women's bodies with matter and, consequently, the expulsion and exclusion of women's bodies from the eschaton.

The effects of such constructions are shown to remain prevalent, albeit in more subtle ways, in contemporary thought. Some feminist theologians note and utilise the rhetoric of rape and exploitation in order to expose the simultaneous abuse of women and the earth. Meant both literally and metaphorically, these references show that gendered attitudes towards matter are contemporary issues of crucial importance. They explain the particular ways in which the body of the earth and women's bodies have been oppressed and abused, namely though violence and violation. As Gudmarsdottir (2010, 206) observes:

> When the earth is declared a body, violated by human consumption and greed, powerful transformations of language take place. On the one hand symbolic connections between nature and women are affirmed; on the other the experience of sexual violence that women especially suffer are addressed and intensified to a cosmic scale.

This links the destruction of the earth and the abuse of women's bodies in such a way that affirms the identification of the two whilst emphasising the severity and magnitude of abusive attitudes and actions towards women.[40] Reaffirming the value of the earth body, and bodies in general, and their equal need for and place in redemption is thus seen by feminist theologians to be key to both rejecting the centralisation of other-worldly eschatological perspectives, and also to challenging the vilification and abuse of women's bodies and the earth body.[41]

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[40] This speaks to the need for theology now to counteract such abuses. Making this a feature of eschatology will thus be important in my thesis.

[41] Given these considerations, a dichotomisation of ecology and eschatology may seem tenable if not inevitable. Brock and Parker, for example, suggest that life is sustained by "integration, interaction, and exchange in the present" and as such, is "ecological, not eschatological" (2008,

Feminist Response: Affirming Embodied Processes

In light of the problems noted thus far, it is understandable that many feminist theologians wish to direct their focus to affirming present, embodied life, particularly in relation to aspects of existence traditionally associated with women. Given the shared subjugation of women and the earth, many of the contributions conduct these affirmations with a concurrent focus on the earth. Thus, what is claimed for one will often be claimed for the other, as we will see Anne Primavesi argue shortly. It is, however, helpful to distinguish particular nuances in feminist theologians' affirmations of the two, not only to highlight that women's bodies and the earth body are distinct, but also to note the variety of perspectives presented by feminist theologians. In relation to the affirmation of qualities associated with female bodies, then, it is again helpful to examine the work of Grace Jantzen. Jantzen emphasises the *process* of becoming, and citing David Palin, agrees with him that "to be actual and hence to be a concrete reality is to be in process" (1998, 255). Personhood, for Jantzen, is thus defined not only by the way in which one changes, but by the very fact that one changes. This is in contrast to the classical perspectives that some feminist theologians critique for their prioritisation of an unchanging eternity over a fluid and changing temporality, as has been seen. This is not to say, however, that Jantzen rejects ideas of the future; on the contrary. Her emphasis on *becoming* is further defined as *becoming divine*, that is, yearning for and moving towards a "divine horizon", which is understood to be "that ideal likeness we may both project and reflect" (1998, 13). This was earlier

388), presumably associating ecology with that which is present and earthly, and eschatology with that which is future and otherworldly. Such a dichotomisation between ecology and eschatology can, however, be questioned: consideration may be given to whether there is scope for envisioning an eschatology that can sustain ecology. This will be an important question for my thesis given the ways in which patriarchal theology has devalued materiality in its constructions of the earth body and female bodies. In other words, if a futurist vision of eschatology is to be at all beneficial, as my thesis will propose, then it must avoid the ignorance of and disregard for ecology that has been identified with some traditional understandings of eschatology.

expounded in relation to constructions of God but it can also inform our understandings of creation, as Jantzen suggests that notions of ideal humanity are projected onto the divine and then sought to be reflected through becoming, and in the yearning to become, divine. Moreover, Jantzen insists that this "yearning" should not be thought of as "just an ineffectual feeling"; instead, she sees it as "above all ethical", that is, an ethical response to the face of the Other (1998, 236). Jantzen here understands the Other to be other "natals" and the earth (1998, 254; cf. 263).[42] Jantzen is clear in locating such an Other in this present, embodied world, and not in "some other world beyond embodiment or beyond death" (1998, 265). Thus, the future, and indeed the divine, is presented as the projection of what we are now and the reflection of what we yearn to be, both of which are thoroughly embodied and relational. In Jantzen's understanding, the future horizon is integral to personhood, to "becoming divine", and is not concerned with ultimate achievement but with being fully embedded in the embodied processes of life.[43]

Part of being embedded in embodied processes means, for many, an appreciation and acceptance of embodied limitations, be they suffering, pain, or ultimately, death. Christ, for example, is particularly helpful in explaining this, arguing that "When we are aware of our bodies, we are aware of limitations: we cannot be everywhere and we will surely die" (1987, 97). An appreciation of life, for Christ, thus means loving "this life which ends in death" (1987, 95). Whilst this does not necessarily equate to denying the possibility of life enduring after death, it refuses to focus on such a possibility. Instead,

[42] Here, Jantzen critically employs Levinas to aid and support her understanding of the role of the Other in becoming divine. Whilst acknowledging that Levinas's perspective on responsibility to the Other should be treated with caution by feminist philosophers because of its potential *prioritisation* of the Other at the expense of the self, Jantzen makes a sustained point of showing that there are resources in the tradition that can and do benefit feminist thought (see 1998, 3, 107; cf. Isherwood, 2001, 87). Whilst I do not intend to engage with such thinkers to the extent that Jantzen does, for reasons previously noted, she is nevertheless useful in illustrating that the master's tools can in fact be used to dismantle the master's house (cf. Lorde, 1984, 112), as I consistently claim throughout my thesis.

[43] This phrase is an adaptation of the title of an article by Carol Christ: *Embodied Embedded Mysticism* (2008).

death is interpreted as one of the many processes of a life that is unequivocally embodied. Jantzen (1998, 155) further expounds the impact of this, claiming that rather than using our energy to "struggle against finitude, we can rejoice in the (limited) life we have as natals and act for love of the world" (1998, 155). Jantzen, then, associates the acceptance of limitations with a celebration of and love for life, which is contrasted with the rejection of life that is suggested by a "struggle against finitude". Carol Christ is again in agreement with Jantzen, as she suggests that an acceptance of the limitations of life redirects our attention to the here and now and compels us to "enjoy whatever time is left as much as possible" (Christ, 2003, 124). It seems that death is both sobering and encouraging: it reminds us that we are indeed limited, but inspires us to seek the best possible life within these limitations. By emphasising the inescapability and even the celebration of limited lives lived in limited bodies, whilst also not denying the possibility of after-death existences, it seems that both embodiment and (the possibility of) eschatology are affirmed.[44]

Feminist Response: Affirming Earthen Cyclicity

Before assessing feminist theologians' appraisals of earthen life, we should note that some feminist theologians, perhaps out of a concern not to perpetuate essentialised understandings of women's bodies, assert that reclaiming the worth of both women

[44] Despite the benefits of these views, Christ and Jantzen do not sufficiently attend to the reasons and experiences of those individuals who seek or need some semblance of post-mortem reconciliation or healing. This is not to discount the fact that both Christ and Jantzen are familiar with the pains and sufferings that are so often embroiled in death – Christ's autobiographical moments (see 2003, 90-91), and an awareness of Jantzen's experience with and ultimately her death caused by cancer, illustrate that they know them well. Christ and Jantzen's ability to neither deny or become inordinately concerned with death, but rather seek to reconfigure it from the perspective of life is an undoubtedly beneficial approach and one that informs my own explorations. However, the possibility of a focus on life speaking to experiences of death is underdeveloped here. Hurd detects a similar oversight, noting that Jantzen acknowledged death but "effectively passed over the matter, emphasizing love of life and this world above concern about our physical end" (2013, 199). Hurd goes on to suggest that an appreciation of natality and birth can have bearing for experiences of death and dying (2013, 199). Similarly, Chapter Three responds to the oversight noted above, whilst also benefiting from these thinkers' emphases on life, in order to construct an eschatology rooted in life, wherein life and not death causes suffering to end and flourishing to be experienced fully.

and the earth is not as simple as asserting that both are equal and identical in their value. Gudmarsdottir (2010, 207) in particular notes a potential problem with feminist theologians continuing to speak in terms of the dichotomisation of women and nature with men and spirit. She explains that:

> When women claim solidarity with nature based on a common patriarchal subordination, they run the risk of conveniently fitting into the patriarchal sister-categories of women and nature.

For Gudmarsdottir, then, the feminist theologian must be aware of and resist inheriting and reaffirming the patriarchal categorisations of women and nature. However, it is apparent that feminist theologians are not, on the whole, concerned so much with resisting the identification of women and nature, but rather with seeking to challenge the oppressive reasons for and results of this identification. The motivation for most, if not all, feminist theological responses to the association of women with nature or the earth is not to reproduce the dualism and so continue to justify the subordination of women, but rather to reclaim the identification in order to affirm all that has been devalued by this union. We remember that it is not necessarily the dualisms themselves that are problematic, but the "associations that are made and attached to each pair of the dichotomy" (McCulloch, 2002, 21; cf. Jones, 2000, 30). Thus, it is the values assigned to the dichotomous pairs rather than the dichotomies themselves that are exposed as problematic.

The intended or potential result of feminist theologians' revaluation of female bodies and the earth body is surmised particularly well by Primavesi, who argues that the simultaneous affirmation of women and nature will prevent the depiction of both as inferior. "Instead", she writes, "what will be claimed for women in respect to God will be claimed for Nature also" (1991, 143). The previous attention paid to rethinking God again resurfaces as important, and Primavesi uses this to promote a celebration of that which has been historically demonised by patriarchy. Furthermore, she locates the

liberation of both women and nature in this connection as any value, worth, or meaning that is claimed for one is similarly claimed for the other. Again, this does not mean that the *specific ways* in which the two are valued will be identical. Rather, because the two have been devalued on account of their mutual equation with fluidity and temporality, the affirmation of some of their specific experiences of these can pave the way to similarly value the others'.[45]

Bearing in mind this assertion that the revaluation of qualities associated with female bodies and the earth body may be similar but not identical, we can draw parallels between Jantzen's affirmation of embodied processes through reference to natality and flourishing, and feminist theological responses to the devaluation of the earth. These responses tend to focus on affirming the cyclical, unending, and ever-changing nature of life. Such thinkers again include Rosemary Radford Ruether, who understands life in terms of its constant renewal as opposed to its ultimate end. Far from being a new concept, Ruether notes that such thought existed in Ancient Near Eastern cultures, who saw "the cycles of renewal of nature as the key to the constant hope for renewed life, resurrected from drought and death" (2002, 203). Ruether confirms her alignment with this perspective by later proposing that "bodies and nature contain the promise of continuing springtime, new greening that again and again makes the overcoming of drought and death possible" (2008, 337). Unlike the acceptance of death that was detectable in the work of Jantzen and Christ, then, Ruether seems to posit cyclicity as making manifest the perpetual tenacity of life. However, reading further it becomes

[45] These considerations will be important for my thesis as they note that the identification of women with nature need not be a tool of patriarchy, but can be a tool to dismantle patriarchy by re-envisioning the identification in undoubtedly positive, and even divine, terms. As noted in my Introduction, though, the primary focus of my thesis is a rethinking of eschatology in relation to framings and some experiences of female bodies. This does not signify a neglect of the earth-denying sentiments of traditional models of eschatology, but it does propose that affirming women's bodies must be primary as they have been *most* devalued by traditional models of eschatology. Given the assertions made here, though, an affirmation of female bodies in the eschaton may also have positive implications for the earth body.

clear that Ruether's perspective is in fact similar to Jantzen's and Christ's. She calls for a *metanoia,* or "conversion" to our material environment. For Ruether, this means seeing both change and death as "good", for they "belong to the natural limits of life". It is within these limits, and not in some future eschatological existence, that we are to seek life (2002, 313-315). Ruether thus presents a dual perspective on death whereby the conversion to material life both accepts the presence of death and continually overcomes it. Death is thus presented not as an *evil* to be overcome but rather as integral to the perpetual cycle of life beginning anew.[46]

There exists within the literature yet more support for emphasising the processual nature of life, as manifest in perpetual seasonality and the endurance of embodied processes. Catherine Keller, for example, has coined the phrase "timefulness" in order to claim that "time is of the essence" (1996a, 134), meaning that time is integral to created beings. Keller uses this to assert that time is inseparable from materiality. What is meant by "time" here is not clock-watching, but rather the passing of moments which is and can only ever be experienced in materiality. It is within the transitory nature of materiality that Keller locates worth. Existence here is characterised by perpetual cyclicity; an assertion which Keller claims affirms "finitude while averting finality. Finitude without end" (1996a, 274). What is essentially being communicated here, then, is the unending nature of natural endings. Cyclicity and seasonality, comprised of both life and death, are here understood to be authentic and inescapable aspects of life. Affirming these is deemed to be more capable of honouring the

[46] This alternative reading of death informs my proposals in Chapter Three that death can be transformed by life. I differ from Ruether, though, by locating the fullness and completeness of this in the eschatological future, and also by retaining a sense in which we can *experience* this fullness of life.

processual nature of becoming settled in our embodiments than any body-denying or body-fleeing eschatology.[47]

Locating this Thesis

Chapter Three, then, emerges out of a deficiency I detect in some of the above-noted perspectives. These deficiencies are informed by the value I find in feminist theologians' emphases on embodied fluidity and life; the reluctance amongst feminist theologians to think of these aspects being experienced in full marks the core of my critique. I claim, then, that the attachment to continuous process and, accordingly, a lack of any eschatological future, is only justifiable if we continue to hold fast to the patriarchal construction of that future as disembodied and otherworldly. Janet Martin Soskice is helpful here, as she provides an alternative reading of process and becoming. She infers that a sense of finality is actually beneficial to an emphasis on becoming by suggesting that a vision of ending is integral to conceiving of what we are becoming. "'What we will be'", she writes, "is not separable from what we were made to be and what we now are" (2007, 181). This implies that there is a continuation, for Soskice, between the embodied and changing beings we presently are and the beings we will become in the future. Moreover, for Soskice the acknowledgement of a future fulfilment carries with it a sense of humility as it accepts that "we do not yet know fully what we will be, because we do not yet fully know the glory of God. For now we have only glimpses" (2007, 183). Similarly, Russell contends that the glory of God is located in creation becoming what God intends creation to be (1982a, 38). Thus there is also an element of difference in Soskice and Russell's perceptions of the future, whereby the beings we will become are as yet, in part, a mystery. Locating personhood *only* in the becoming, then, and not in the ultimate being is somewhat limited. The dual inference

[47] These perspectives help us to value the dynamic changes that are present within creation; my thesis will diverge from these views, though, as I will propose that these changes can be transformed in the eschaton in such a way that dynamic life abounds but death does not.

to continuation and difference in the future signals the possibility of both appreciating feminist theological appraisals of process and also retaining an eschatological perspective.

Chapter Three will thus seek to specify the future alluded to by Soskice and Russell by constructing a model of eschatologically embodied endurance and transformation that makes central the change and fluidity that has been so devalued by patriarchal constructions of female bodies. By focussing on transformation as opposed to overcoming, I will resist the language of conquest and allusions to dominance but retain the life-affirming perspectives of the thinkers noted. Indeed, we remember that Isasi-Díaz, whose contributions are crucial to the explorations in the following section, notes that we need to flesh out "the kind of new heaven and the new earth for which justice-seeking people hunger and thirst" (1999, 229). Chapter Three, then, attempts this "fleshing out", quite literally, in order to specify the ways in which this hunger and this thirst for embodied justice may be satiated. Such specificity will then lead to Chapter Four's attempts to suggest ways we may taste this now, which speaks to the final problem noted by feminist theologians: that of the time of the future.

**Time: Eschatology and Futurity**

So far, we have seen feminist theologians respond to problems with the process and content of eschatology by emphasising responsibility and relationality, and embodied and earthen life. There exists another related issue here, though; namely that in addition to the problems associated with the process and content of eschatology, the very discussion of the process and content envisages the location of both

predominantly in the future.[48] As such, a trend that runs throughout feminist responses is a focus on the present, born out of a desire to assuage this sense of delay. Attempts are made to centralise and specify ways to achieve liberation in the here and now. Integral to this is praxis, framed in terms of resistance, practicality, and feasibility. Similar to the emphasis on embodied and earthen limitations, though, there is again an acceptance that these moves to achieve liberation are limited. This is not, as we shall see, deemed to be problematic as worth is located in the struggle more than the achievement. Contributions from feminist liberation theologians, such as Ada María Isasi-Díaz, are particularly noteworthy here.

Problem: A Delayed Promise and Hope

The first contention to note, raised by feminist theologians in relation to the apparent futurist leanings of traditional models of eschatology, is that they delay liberation and have thus been ineffective in challenging oppressive structures. Isasi-Díaz shows an appreciation for the attraction of a future perspective, noting that "When the present is limiting – oppressive – one looks to the future to find a reason for living" (2004b, 52). However, she writes that despite the comfort that such a perspective may provide, such a model of the future actually signifies the tradition's deferment of liberation to an ever-elusive future. There are some clear power dynamics at play here: the deferment of hope and promise to the future appears to be a luxury afforded to those who are in no immediate need of specific and realistic liberation. Indeed, Ivone Gebara notes that the experience of poverty and the need to fight for survival can often prevent the search for new alternatives (2010, 54). Oppression can, then, hinder the ability to think of the future; the reality of the present, saturated with suffering, absorbs all attention. When

[48] Given such overlapping, the discussions in this section are not as vast as previous sections; many of the problems have already been examined, and responses noted thus far have already attended to the apparent futurist leanings of eschatology by emphasising embodied relationality and fluidity and creaturely responsibility in the present. Whilst it is not necessary to repeat their claims, the responses already noted do provide a substantial basis for those attended to in this section.

the immediate reality is too painful and the eschatological promise too distant, the oppressed are left in a liminal space of "resignation and expectation" (Isasi-Díaz, 1988, 99). Theologies that focus *only* on contemplating future existence are thus indicative of a privileged status and a degree of detachment from those for whom such imaginings are irrelevant if not impossible. As Isasi-Díaz claims, such theologies have been used "to encourage the poor and the oppressed to postpone hope and expectations to the next world" (2004b, 52). This highlights the complexity of the issue, for eschatology appears to be a powerful force for both comfort in the midst of suffering and resignation to that suffering. It would seem that the greater the suffering is, the more comforting the eschatological hope becomes but, likewise, the more essential it is for those in power that the eschatological promise is delayed. Eschatology here serves those in power by being disassociated from and incapable of touching the present. Resigned to the future alone, it is accused of constructing liberation as a distant utopic hope and oppression as an unavoidable present reality; the former to be wished for, the latter to be endured.[49]

Karen Baker-Fletcher confirms Isasi-Díaz's observations, noting how eschatological hope and comfort has often been used by patriarchy in order to pacify those it oppresses, who so often are women. We remember Baker-Fletcher's engagement with Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple,* and her explanation of how dreams of heaven were juxtaposed with resistance and protest (1998, 121). She goes on to explain that

[49] This indicates the necessity for any reconstruction of eschatology to take seriously such particular experiences and to be capable of offering something back to those experiences. Still, my ability to contemplate such reconstructions admittedly signifies a proximity to privilege. Whilst my ability to empathise with these perspectives is limited, though, my commitment to listening to them is not. Elizabeth A. Johnson claims that such listening is the basis of feminist ethics which, she claims, should strive "to listen to women for clues as to how they experience and interpret reality, and to use these indicators as guides to construct a vision of a moral universe wherein women's well-being, along with everything they cherish is promoted" (2002, 67). Furthermore, Nicola Slee writes that listening is a "spiritual practice", given the attentiveness and commitment, to both oneself and the other, that it requires (2013, 18). I similarly strive to uphold such a stance in this thesis by attending to some accounts of women's lived experiences.

such dreaming jeopardises life and is in fact suicidal, for it "fails to respect God's gift of an embodied self in this life" (1998, 121). It is clear from this, then, that traditional models of eschatology devalue life both by promoting an immaterial future (as the earlier section noted) and by locating all value in this unattainable future. Indeed, each problem noted exposes the *thoroughly* unattainable nature of traditional eschatologies, for at each stage they have been alienated from our present experiences.

However, some feminist theologians argue that it is not, and has not always been the case that the comfort and hope provided by an eschatological perspective is pacifying or luxurious. There are instances where such a hope has been edifying and empowering. Linda A. Moody (1996, 96) notes that:

> When all else around them seemed hopeless, Black slaves could turn to God, singing, praying, and shouting their troubles away. At the same time, the Black religious experience provided slaves with a religion that enabled them to resist slavery and to work for freedom.

Comfort here was a corollary to, and perhaps even sustained acts of resistance.[50] Even when such resistance is not the product of comfort though, the importance of comfort in and of itself should not be underestimated. This is recognised as an omission in the theologies of some, though it is not always framed as a deficiency. Mary Grey, for example, recognises that her understanding of the future as cyclical means that "there is no real hope experienced for the future", and though she still maintains that the process of becoming "demands that we move forward" (1989, 80), to what end and for what purpose is unclear. Moreover, Grey recognises that a solely presentist focus does not provide a once-and-for-all solution, perceiving as she does that present redemption cannot eliminate all suffering and that "illness, bereavement and breakdown of relationships" are inevitable parts of present existence (1989, 3). Again, then, we can

[50] Moody's reference to "Black religious experience" infers an important point; namely that the comfort sought and found was rooted in Black people's *experiences*. This was a comfort that was not defined or dictated by the oppressor, and as such indicates an element of self-possession and self-definition that is important to liberationist re-modellings of hope, as we shall shortly see.

observe here a re-emergence of the key concern to affirm and accept the limitations of embodied life.

Whereas contemplation about the future was earlier identified as a luxury of the privileged, it may also be the case that the *lack* of a future perspective is indicative of a privileged position. Althaus-Reid and Isherwood (2007, 119) note that the absence of an alternative future fails to:

> take account of the life-experience of those who, because of social, economic and ecological situations, die young and have no chance to flourish, unlike most western middle-class people.

This suggests that the rejection of a future comfort, hope, and promise, far from emphasising life in the present, can actually restrict one's reality to life in the present. When one's present experience is void of the "chance to flourish", a future characterised by a specific model of flourishing can provide a beam of hope in an otherwise bleak world. Whilst this may potentially appear to be yet another placating tool of a patriarchal eschatology, or a religious crutch upon which disempowered people(s) can passively rest, this need not be the case. In further support of such hope, Althaus-Reid and Isherwood provide an overview of Elizabeth Stuart's perspective, noting her contention that in rejecting all thoughts about the eschatological future, feminist theology has simultaneously rejected the way in which to gain perspective on present experiences. Instead, Althaus-Reid and Isherwood note Stuart's claim that feminist theology, in depriving itself of a "heaven", has "damned itself to the unforgiving and suffocating present" (2007, 120-121). This infers that without a future perspective the present has the last word in situations of oppression. Stuart's comment exposes the inadequacy of a solely presentist stance in providing a substantial and empowering hope, and supports the possibility of the future to instil such hope. Indeed, many liberationist perspectives, whilst critical of traditional constructions of hope, seek to

retain hope by reconstructing its focus and meaning as something powerful and effective.

Another important contribution to note here is Christina Thürmer-Rohr's argument that a utopic future hope resonates too closely with "the young white man's idealist adventure to the new frontier or the old white man's yearning for immortality" (as cited by Keller, 1996a, 123) by locating hope in that which is unattainable, in the present at least. Keller further interrogates patriarchal theological constructions of the "place" of the present, particularly as they are constructed in relation to the time of the future. She recognises that women have been "scapegoats for [...] a masculine escape from time" due to their identification with "finitude, mortality, and corruption itself" (1996a, 127). Keller supports the claims noted earlier by other feminist theologians by arguing that the time of the future has colonised the space of the present (1996a, 148). Keller draws a distinction here between space and place, effectively naming place as what happens to space: "the relationality of space, [the] intersubjectively occupied space" (1996a, 144). Place is thus, for Keller, the relational engagement and materialisation of space, which is dichotomised against and colonised by time. Unlike other thinkers, though, Keller adds that the possession of place is supported by the possession of time, both of which are seen as male prerogatives. The depiction of power as possession again resurfaces. Moreover, Keller claims that the gendered language used to characterise space transforms it into a place that is open to future abuses and invasions (1996a, 127). Keller names this the "annihilation of space by time" (1996a, 148), effected by colonizing particular places. The implications of such an attitude are that theology fails to "mourn the loss of habitat" by "forget[ting] forward, into a supernaturally artificial environment" (1996a, 150). This "forgetting forward", Keller claims, enables and justifies the disregard and in some cases

destruction of space, which is contextualised as place through its association with the female.

Interestingly, time in this context is associated with the male; this displays Keller's novel perspective as the relativity of time, or the fluidity of temporality, has more often been associated with female bodies, as we have seen. Keller explains this by claiming that binary ways of thinking are "context-specific" (1996a, 128). Indeed, Keller's argument offers the unique contention that the association of women with time is malleable and able to be changed in order to serve the agenda of a patriarchal vision of eschatology. Such a separation of time from place is difficult to detect elsewhere in the literature: the two have been so intertwined and jointly associated with women, as has been seen. Nevertheless, Keller is helpful in highlighting the problems with locating the future as somewhere outside of this earth – an issue we do see reflected in the rest of the literature. In summary, Keller's contribution is indispensible in expounding the problems with prioritising the time of the future over the place of the present. This shows the necessity of eschatology taking the present seriously, particularly the present as it is experienced by women, as their bodies have been constructed as the reason and vehicle for the escape or possession of the present.

Whilst Keller's attention to time and space/place has a unique focus and articulation, aspects of her argument are similarly proposed by other feminist theologians. Brock and Parker, for instance, claim that the "founders" of North America harboured notions of a New World that envisioned and idealised a "paradise-past and paradise-to-come" and subsequently sought to "regain paradise by wiping away Satan's old world and claiming Christ's new one – by any means necessary" (2008, 340). Such attitudes, it is observed, led to a desire to define the land's current inhabitants as intruders, when in reality it was the "founders" who were the most intrusive, arriving as they did with

their notions of land ownership and property that were foreign to the native tribes they encountered (Bourne citing tribe leader Massasoit, as cited by Brock and Parker, 2008, 349). The idea of regaining and reforming this lost paradise encapsulates both nostalgia for a pre-fallen perfection and hope for a perfect future, with women's bodies, Keller observes, "absorb[ing] the full force" of this nostalgic-utopic presently-occurring apocalypse (1996a, 164). The present is thus literally and symbolically gendered, and valued only in its openness to penetration from the past or projection into the future. The problems are only exacerbated when this is coupled with the patriarchal use of eschatological hope to encourage passive acquiescence to present suffering.

Feminist Response: A Realistic Praxis and Hope

Before exploring some ways in which hope has been reconfigured, we should firstly note the emphasis that these responses place on praxis. Whilst this is not strictly a response to the futurist leanings of traditional models of eschatology it is, more widely, a critique and reconstruction of the intellectualised preoccupations of classical theology which, it seems, are exemplified in eschatology. Emphasis here is placed on the struggle against oppression, which is summarised neatly by Isasi-Díaz, who writes that "*La vida es la lucha* - the struggle is life" (1988, 99). By emphasising the struggle, attention is directed away from the outcome of the struggle and toward the realistic and feasible conditions needed to make the struggle possible and worthwhile. The struggle is *for* life, but more importantly for Isasi-Díaz, the struggle *is life itself.* By focussing on the struggle instead of the "fruits of labor" or the "reward", Isasi-Díaz posits a challenge to the "resignation and expectation" that has been critiqued (Isasi-Díaz, 1988, 99). What is prioritised here is practical attention to and action for liberation from concrete experiences of oppression.

For Isasi-Díaz, it is important that this struggle for liberation is realistic: if it were unattainable it would merely lead to apathy – a very real experience for Latina women, she notes. This echoes the earlier-noted work of Jantzen who claimed that the divine horizon was not to be thought of as something that we have no possibility of ever achieving (1998, 92). Rather than having an unattainable goal, then, Isasi-Díaz claims that the goal must continuously be re-considered in order that its accomplishment be a real possibility (2004b, 55). In addition to this, Isasi-Díaz notes that the struggle is often tinged with fear; not that its goal may be accomplished but rather that the accomplishments may be "co-opted by the status quo". This means, for Isasi-Díaz (2004b, 55-56), that the struggle must be self-inspecting and specific, as she writes:

> In order to counteract apathy and fear, we have to continue to elaborate our vision of the future at the same time that we work to articulate the details of our *proyecto histórico* [historical project]. Making our preferred future a reality needs much more than vague generalities. Latinas' *proyecto histórico* has to be specific enough for each of us to know how we are to participate in the struggle to make it a reality, and what our task will be when it becomes a reality.

By referring to "what our task will be when it becomes a reality" Isasi-Díaz signifies the cyclical process of liberation. Just as earlier contributions emphasised this in relation to affirming the earth and embodied lives, Isasi-Díaz refers to it here in order to emphasise the need to continually reassess and recreate the moves of liberation. In this way, she speaks of a historical future in a way that is averse to the spiritualised and intellectualised nature of traditional eschatological futures. Moreover, she emphasises the specificity and particularity of Latina struggles and the need to envision a future rooted in and capable of speaking to their lives.[51]

Many womanist theologians have claimed that their moves towards liberation and, indeed, their hopes for such liberation, can be developed by remembering their pasts.

[51] I contend that such contributions can help us to think eschatologically: by constructing the content of the eschaton as being characterised by particular bodies, such a future is able to affirm them and empower their struggle for integrity and worth. The meaning and value of struggles and, more specifically, struggles for survival, are attended to in Chapter Four.

These remembrances, although sometimes lacking in specificity, are substantial enough to fuel movements towards liberation. As Baker-Fletcher (1998, 30) writes:

> While we may not know *how* our mothers 'walked their trouble down' or 'how our fathers stood their ground,' we do remember that they did so. That's why we believe we too can survive both the evil of social injustice and natural disasters

Remembrance, for Baker-Fletcher, thus sustains the hope that troubles can once again be overcome and resistance can once again be achieved. Oduyoye combines this remembrance with a practice of self-direction, claiming that "I have the memory of the future my grandmother and my mother put before me; I live out this future while creating a future for myself" (Oduyoye, 1988, 35-36). For these thinkers, then, active remembrances of past liberation, which themselves were possibly fuelled by hope, contribute to hope in the present; the meaning and purpose of which must continuously be examined in relation to what it means "for myself". It is possible to infer from this that remembrance is important not only to conceiving of a continuation of identity and selfhood but also to constructing one's own hope for the future.

Moreover, the hope enabled by such remembrances is rooted in experiences *and* is committed to once again making those experiences as liberating as possible. As such, this remembrance can speak to what should endure in the future and what should cease. That which was experienced as liberating can, in this way, be affirmed and that which was experienced as oppressive can be afforded the ultimate contradiction.[52] Kwok Pui-lan confirms this task, writing that "Women of all colors need to search for the liberating fragments in our inheritance so that we can mend the creation for our daughters and their daughters" (2005, 230). Whether the past we inherit is liberating

[52] Such uses of affirmation and contradiction are similarly employed in this thesis, particularly in Chapter Three. However, I seek to add yet more specificity by using these affirmations and contradictions to *construct* specific understandings of our existences in the eschatological future, as noted in this thesis's Introduction.

or oppressive, the remembrance of it is here understood as bearing the capacity to shape the future we seek *and* the way we live in the present.

Although these perspectives are sometimes lacking in specificity (exemplified in Baker-Fletcher's admission that "we may not know *how*" liberation was sought or achieved), Letty Russell, despite appearances thus far, does seek a greater degree of specificity. She similarly upholds the importance of remembering but posits this in relation to the future. For Russell, past instances of God's love enable one to "remember" the future that such love promises which in turn gives clues as to the meaning of loving relationships in the here and now (1979a, 157-8). Russell holds the past, present, and future together in such a way that they become mutually influential to one another and as such are all affirmed and assigned value. Still, Russell prioritises the future, arguing that it is the lens through which the past and present should be interpreted and understood (1979a, 164). In terms of interpreting the *present*, Russell envisions a focus on the future as having the ability to "overcome all forms of dualism by moving from future wholeness toward present human transformation" (1979a, 164), meaning that anything in the "present reality" that is dehumanising is challenged and contradicted by this future perspective (1979a, 167). This is not, however, a stagnant contradiction: it does not only describe what should not be but also prescribes what should be. If the future is characterised by liberation, partnership, and wholeness (1979a, 175-6) then the present should be too. Russell looks to the future, then, as she believes it has the ability to fuel and inform movements towards this abolition and construction. For Russell, then, the eschatological future does not detract from the present, but in fact enlivens and substantiates the present.

Locating this Thesis

Russell's specificity nevertheless remains somewhat limited. Although she justifies this by referring to trust in God's promises (1979a, 165), Russell ultimately reproduces the caution that exists amongst many feminist theologians concerning talk about the future. Whilst one can never, of course, fully verify notions of the future, I intend to question whether one's only option is to be resigned to such reticence. If Russell is correct in her view that the future is *important*, and I believe she is, then there is a need to specify why and how it is so. A key aspect of this can and should, for reasons noted in this section, be the relationship that the future has to the present and more specifically, on the practicality and liveability of such a future. I am convinced by the responses that emphasise the importance of struggle and survival for they speak to the realities of experiences of oppression and seek concrete ways to alleviate and change them.

The emphasis placed on hope is also important, though it is this aspect which I feel could benefit from specification, both in terms of what the hope is for and how that hope can be lived in the present. Thus, Chapter Three's reconstructions of the content of the future seek to name that hope, which will then inform Chapter Four's explorations of how that which is hoped for can be anticipated and created by life in the present. The perspectives noted in this section will further inform Chapter Four, as the emphasis on reclaiming the significance of one's own life and experiences helps to suggest certain values that must be made central; values such as self-love and self-touch. I will be mindful of these when negotiating the process and content of eschatology in order that my reconstructions are able to contribute to a practice where they are affirmed and enabled to flourish. Such constructions will also build on assertions I intend to make in Chapter Two by reiterating that the time of the future is not yet fully known or created, and that our actions are worthwhile and can shape the future we hope for.

**Conclusion**

So far I have addressed the many and varied problems with traditional Christian understandings of eschatology, as exposed by feminist theological engagements with the tradition. We have seen how feminist theologians have exposed the tendency within eschatological thought (whether intentional or accidental; explicit or implied) to uphold certain definitions of female bodies and proceed to devalue them. This was understood to have been achieved by constructing the process, content, and time of the eschaton in patriarchal, androcentric, and futurist fashions. Suspicions of the eschatological future within feminist theology are thus legitimate and understandable, and call for serious consideration, as I have attempted to do in this chapter. This is, however, only half of the story. I have also indicated here how the eschatological future can be reconstructed from values which emerge within feminist theological literature. These pertain to the affirmation of embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuous tactility.[53] I have signalled my intention to show that rethinking the eschatological future on the basis of these values can pose a significant challenge to patriarchal constructions of female bodies and can envision a more hopeful future for all of creation. This has not always been posited in contradiction to feminist responses; the propensity for feminist theologians to inform my own response has been noted, as have some perspectives that show a degree of appreciation for a future (if not always eschatological) perspective.

In light of the explorations I have undertaken in this chapter, I am mindful of the ways in which my constructions must proceed; firstly what I need to avoid and secondly what values and characteristics I must affirm. These are not separate concerns: the need for eschatology to affirm the qualities associated with, and some experiences of,

[53] Though tactility may not have emerged as being explicitly evident in the feminist theological perspectives addressed here, the emphasis on embodied relationality and relational presence, coupled with allusions to being "in touch" with our bodies, infer an appreciation of tangibly feeling and responding to oneself and to others in embodied relations.

female bodies arises because it has overwhelmingly discounted and discredited them. In short, then, I must seek to construct an eschatology which avoids the latter and contributes to the former. We remember, though, that my approach here does not simply reproduce patriarchal essentialisms by claiming that *all* women experience their bodies as relational, fluid, and sensuous, and that *all* men do not. Rather, I detect a need to revalue these qualities, along with some women's experiences of them, because the the tradition has assigned these traits exclusively to female bodies, and has proceeded to devalue both the traits and female bodies. That some women *do* experience their bodies in these ways is understood to be significant and in need of affirmation. Recalling my earlier claims, this is fuelled by the belief that embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality are beneficial qualities for all existences to experience and cultivate.

I now approach the task, then, of imagining and imaging an eschatology that is unequivocally embedded in embodiment. I will seek to make a new contribution by beginning from where feminist theology has seemingly stalled or refused to move by rethinking God specifically in relation to the eschatological future. I benefit from the feminist perspectives noted, though, as I will conduct this rethinking in light of feminist appraisals of embodied relationality and connectedness. In so doing, I will strive for a remodelling of the eschatological process that is capable of holding together creaturely freedom, divine-creation relationality, and divine power for creation. This will ground my later moves to rethink the content and time of the eschaton, for in reconfiguring how we get to the future I can consider how we exist in that future and, finally, how we can live such a future now.

## 2. A Relational Process[54]

### Introduction

This chapter responds to feminist critiques surrounding the process of eschatology, and embarks upon developing their constructions of divine power as power-in-relation. Rather than locating these considerations primarily in the present, though, my rethinking of divine-creation relations will be used to reconfigure the eschatological process. Cummings Neville claims that "the deepest question of eschatology is to address the relation of human life to God in light of the difference between time and eternity" (2005, 41). If his assertion is correct, then negotiating the ways in which God relates to creation is integral to eschatology.[55] As such, aspects of feminist theological models of the specific nature of "the relation of human life to God" will be used to remodel the specific nature of the eschatological process. In short, this chapter will argue that divine relational presence is to be understood as embodied perception of and response to creation. I will claim that these are directed by God's love for and loyalty to creation, such that God helps creation to experience relational presence in full, which is understood both in terms of intimacy and universality. I will develop the notion that the divine embrace caresses creation into the full experience of relationality whilst also holding open space for creation to genuinely affect this process. Such a remodelling of the eschatological process will be seen to effect the full actualisation of relational freedom.

### Divine Power as Relational

#### The Case for Relationality

[54] Parts of this chapter appear, in a significantly condensed form, in my article in *Feminist Theology*, entitled "Does Feminism Need the Future?" (2013).

[55] I do not uphold Cummings Neville's distinction between time and eternity for it alludes to eternity being timeless, which simply perpetuates the association of eschatology with immateriality.

I begin, then, by attempting to construct a model of divine-creation relationships that is capable of underpinning a reconstruction of the eschatological process. Whilst upholding the feminist proposal that God cannot possess *all* power, on account of the consequences of this for relationality, I concur with Charles Hartshorne's notion that God can have the "highest conceivable form of power" (1984, 26). Power, for Hartshorne, means the power to participate with creation to whatever degree is possible without jeopardising freedom (Hartshorne, 1984, 25).[56] I digress from Hartshorne in that I propose an *eschatological* vision of divine and creaturely power, participation, and freedom. Still, further extrapolation of the meaning of power remains crucial here in order that it be not only unproblematic but positively beneficial for rethinking the eschatological process. The notion that God can hold the "highest conceivable form of power" is thus combined with feminist appraisals of relationality.

As we have seen, feminist theologians have noted the feminisation and subsequent trivialisation and devaluation of relationality (cf. Christ, 2003, 92). Farmer furthers the observations made in the previous chapter by noting that embodiment and relationality have both been used to characterise women "and hence to exclude or subordinate us" (1987, 1). It seems that any relationship between two "others" thwarts patriarchy's desire to consistently be superior over and separate from the other (cf. Farmer, 1987, 11-12), hence the projection of such connectedness onto female bodies. Chapter One noted that a reclamation of relationality was deemed, by some feminist theologians, to be essential not only to reclaiming the value of this feminised quality but also to affirming all creaturely life. This enables a transformation of patriarchal categorisations, as that which has traditionally been associated with women is seen to give insight into the nature of all of creation and, I propose, the future of creation. We

[56] This could, potentially, still be framed as dominance, though my reconstruction of power will attempt to reframe such power as being informed by God's capacity to be the most loving and loyal and thus exercise power *for* creation as opposed to wielding it over creation. There are intricacies and complexities to such a claim which will be explored later in this chapter.

remember that this is not an exercise in essentialism, though; women's bodies are not characterised as exclusively or simplistically relational.[57] Rather, it is a strategic attempt to remedy the devaluation of women's bodies that has occurred through their association with relationality by claiming embodied relationality to be *indicative of* and not *contrary to* God's nature and intention.

This indicates that bodies can be valued as meaningful not only in the present, but also in their capacity to speak about the future. In this way, they can be named as prophetic. Such a reading of bodies is not new to feminist theology. The reclamation of bodies as primary sites of knowledge that was noted in the Introduction has been engaged with theologically by thinkers such as Elaine Graham, Elizabeth A. Johnson, and Melanie A. May. Graham, for instance, names bodies as "epiphanies of meaning which, while locating us firmly in space and time, also take us beyond mere flesh and blood to confront and reveal deeper threads" (2009b, 84). Johnson grounds a similar conviction in her reading of the *Imago Dei.* As noted in this thesis's Introduction, Johnson claims that God's glory is "women, all women, every woman everywhere, fully alive", and that this flourishing anticipates the fullness of God's glory (2002, 15). Johnson sees relationality as integral to this flourishing (2002, 69) thus suggesting that experiences of relational flourishing image God and the full glory of God in the future. Likewise, May claims that bodies bear witness to the "Good News" by "proclaiming what is and what will be" (1995, 22) and, she continues, "what our bodies know is a life-giving source of our knowledge of God" (1995, 23). Thus, from these thinkers we may garner a sense in which the perceptions and prehensions of our bodies can be eschatological signifiers. They are integral to our beings and capable of expressing the divine. I add to this that by attending to and valuing qualities assigned exclusively to female bodies,

[57] As noted, relationality is understood as a feature that benefits *all* existences, and in addition to this there are certainly difficulties and complexities contained within some women's experiences of relationality. Some of these will be explored over the course of this chapter and will help to develop my definition of relationality.

and to ways in which some women experience these, we can uncover ways to radically rethink the eschaton. This means that our embodied experiences can be both signs of the future and embodiments of that very future.[58]

This radical rethinking requires a clear definition of "embodied relationality", and we can turn again to the feminist theologians noted in Chapter One in order to help with this. Carol Christ, Grace Jantzen, and Sallie McFague, among others, were earlier seen to re-define omnipresence as embodied proximity. This is also supported by Carter Heyward, who writes that "being really present" is what characterises "right relation" (1989, 132). Not only does this signify power-in-presence and embodied proximity, but also authentic availability, attention, and commitment to others.[59] This is not passive presence, then, but active, constructive, and engaging presence; in short, a way of relating that can draw us into "full relationality" in the eschaton. "Full relationality" is used to mean a relationality that is unhindered by either rejection or suffering. A relational God is here understood as not only relating to creation intimately in the present, but also and through this, as finally helping creation to experience this fully in the future.

Still, relationality is a complex value to negotiate. Feminist theologians have revealed the necessity of affirming women's freedom and agency in relationships, as patriarchal models of God have named such freedom and agency as being the domain of the male. Thus, a relational eschatological process must make space for such freedom and agency

[58] Some details of how this may be possible are explored in more depth in Chapter Four.
[59] There is a need to navigate the complexities of this to ensure that such "availability, attention, and commitment to others" does not amount to self-emptying or self-negation. My emergent and developing definition of relationality will thus also note some problems in upholding relationality as the primary value for rethinking the eschatological process, and will accordingly emphasise the importance of a nuanced reading of relationality.

lest it perpetuate patriarchal assumptions concerning femininity.[60] It must also make space for and actively embrace difference and diversity, for as Slee (2004a, 181) notes:

> The emphasis on […] relationality in the work of white feminist theologians has been critiqued by some as a denial of difference and the imposition of false connection between those who are divided by injustice and oppression.

Furthermore, it is also true that relationships themselves may be a cause of suffering for some; Slee, again, observes that "Not all relationship is good" (2004b, 136). Melissa Raphael develops this and, writing of relationships in concentration camps, notes that a "holocaust theology of relation" shows that "relation need not, of itself, connote a moral or practical good" as sometimes the burden and demands of relating to others, in these contexts, was too much to bear (2003, 92-3).[61] However, such experiences can be said to contradict God's relational intentions for creation. They signify the need for a God who not only makes Godself authentically present within suffering but also offers and actuates the freedom from it. That this very often does not occur within the lifespan of an individual or community gives merit to my proposal that we imagine a time when it will occur.

Embodied Relating

Exploring what these relationships may be like is necessary, and the experiences of some women whose bodies are birthing bodies can illuminate this.[62] Elizabeth Johnson asserts that the universal experience of being "knit together" in the womb "is the paradigm without equal" for conceiving of God's relationship with the world (2002,

[60] I will attend to this in the second section of this chapter.
[61] Instances where relationality cannot be said to be an unequivocal "good" may also be experienced by other individuals; certain people with autism, for instance. This firstly speaks to the need for space in our relating, which this chapter will elucidate, and also to how self-touch can be an empowering form of relating to oneself, as Chapter Four explores.
[62] Abraham cautions that "constructive feminist theology must critically assess tropes such as motherhood rather than mobilize them as presupposed or idealized special sources for theological anthropology" (2009, 161). I am mindful of this and thus do not assume that all women experience their bodies as birthing bodies, nor do I claim that those who do experience this in a homogenous fashion. Instead, I note that gestation and maternity are experienced by some women, and as such should be valued, but also that other ways in which women experience their bodies can be just as valuable.

234). This paradigm, she claims, both communicates divine embrace of the world and "lifts up precisely those aspects of women's reality so abhorred in classical Christian anthropology" (2002, 235). Indeed, the birthing power that some women experience has been both usurped and vilified by patriarchal theology. Or, perhaps it would be more accurate to claim that this power has been usurped *because* it has been vilified. This vilification has taken much the same form as the association of women with death: women's connectedness to embodied processes has been deemed to be indicative of the limitations of embodied life. As Miller-McLemore so concisely articulates: "Bodily, monthly, women know life's limits" (1994, 145). Such limitations are named in terms of finitude and transience; attributes that have been greatly feared by a patriarchal theology that prizes the ability of the intellectual and the spiritual to endure forever.[63] This fear has manifest itself in the trivialization of motherhood; the collapsing of women's "procreative powers" into "patronizing sentiments of a Mother's Day sort" (Miller-McLemore, 1994, 138). Thus, not only has relationality been feminised and subsequently trivialised, but so too have maternal bodies. The eschatological dimension of such trivialisation and usurping of relationality and maternity is brought to light by Jantzen's earlier-noted claim that becoming divine requires a process of rebirth by and through the Father God (Jantzen, 1998, 143). Thus, an adequate remedy to problematic images of God cannot merely amount to the transposition of maternal experiences onto God. The very image of God must be substantially rethought, and taking experiences of motherhood and birthing seriously can help with this.

The maternal metaphor can, for instance, offer a model of relational presence that is dynamically active. Presence, particularly as it is imaged in relation to procreative experiences, cannot be thought of as a passive stasis, lest it perpetuate patriarchal

[63] This further justifies my reclamation of bodies in the content of the eschaton in the next chapter.

constructions of the female body. Aristarkhova (2012, 175) makes this clear and she responds by writing:

> The supposed passivity of the maternal relation that is often employed to marginalize the role of the maternal, then, needs to be understood as requiring 'work' as a way of letting the other be, become, breathe.

Thus, a maternal reading of relational presence can and should signify both a deliberate posture and an effective practice. Melissa Raphael adds to this by offering a maternalist perspective on God's presence in the Holocaust. Likening this presence to a mother's response to a child's cries, she writes that "to say 'here I am' is to say here with you *I am*; my being human is to find and be present to you; here, in a place, answering you" (2003, 122-123). This indicates Raphael's reading of *divine* presence for she understands human presence as being energised by and bearing a trace of divine presence (2003, 101). Thus, the mother responding to the cries of her child can help us to image divine relational presence as an active and authentic involvement with and loyalty to creation.

## Relational Perception and Response

### God's Relational Perception of Creation

The use of a model of divine intimacy, or omnipresence, in order to rethink divine power and knowledge certainly seems concurrent with other voices in the feminist discussion. Soskice names this as "continuous presence" (1997, 24-25) whilst Suchocki refers to God as "the everlastingly concrescent entity, [who] must be related to the occasions of every epoch" (1988, 149). Both Soskice and Suchocki seem to combine a sense of relationality with eternity, but this eternity is framed as an ever-presence as opposed to a power over or knowledge of all times, events, and creatures therein. Taking this a step further, Grace Jantzen argues that God's omnipresence does not signify a timeless and spaceless God who entirely transcends the world. Rather, she claims, omnipresence indicates that God's care "extends infinitely beyond the

boundaries of our own little individual worlds" (1984a, 49-50). God is thus understood to be simultaneously infinite and intimate. Furthermore, Jantzen uses this model of God to make claims concerning divine knowledge. Rather than upholding the tradition's framing of such knowledge as prefixed by or experienced as omnipotence, Jantzen suggests that God's knowledge is achieved through a process of acquisition that is enabled by intimate relationships with creation. She claims that "God has intimate personal knowledge of each of us and our circumstances: his [*sic.*] *understanding* (not his [*sic*.] data-retrieval ability) is infinite" (Jantzen, 1984a, 83) Indeed, she claims that knowledge that is impersonal and merely statistical is neither God's concern nor should it be our concern for conceiving of God. What really matters, she contends, is God's ability to understand those feelings and experiences that are genuinely important to us, such as "long-term struggle against depression, or chronic severe discomfort" (1984a, 83). When we consider the presence of such experiences in our lives, Jantzen asserts that:

> it becomes far more significant that God should understand our feelings, not just in the sense of knowing about them from some lofty untouched plane like an eternal bystander, but really sympathizing, 'feeling with us'.

Thus, a God who is able to know creation through understanding which is enabled by intimate and compassionate relational presence is deemed to be a God who is far more relatable to, and able to relate to creation, than a God who impersonally contains all knowledge in a factual, timeless manner.[64]

Moreover, this is an undeniably embodied reading of relational presence: consisting of the embodied perception of and response to the other. Regarding the former, and continuing the appraisal of images of God on understandings of embodiment, Jantzen

[64] Somewhat surprisingly, Augustine may be read as confirming Jantzen's point here; he writes that "It seems to me that the hairs on a head are more easily numbered than are the feelings that beat with the heart" (1950, 63). This infers that a God who perceives and understands our experiences garners a knowledge that is more complex and valuable than a God who always already possesses all knowledge of creation, as the tradition was understood to propose.

also writes that "If we have no experience of perception without embodiment, we are reasonably led to wonder whether a God who has perceptions might also be embodied" (Jantzen, 1984a, 78). For Jantzen, then, God is able to perceive created beings and the world we inhabit because God is intimately and physically connected to them. The maternal metaphor can offer an image of the umbilical connection to confirm this embodied perception of creation, but the relational presence must go further than this lest creation be depicted in a perpetual state of infantilisation. Using this as the starting point, though, can help us to consider the embodied nature of perception in *all* relationships; that is, the way we are able to tangibly feel the experiences of others.[65] Although this does not signify synonymous experiences, it certainly enables empathy. Indeed, Karen Baker-Fletcher claims that it is *empathy* and not *sympathy* that God, in Jesus, experiences (2006, 124), seemingly suggesting that empathy communicates a higher level of understanding and a greater commitment to feeling the suffering of another. God's relational presence is here understood to be embodied in the sense that God authentically and physically shares in our embodied experiences.[66] Divine power, then, is reformulated here as the power to empathise with the experiences of others.

It is also apparent, though, that God may often be experienced as an absence and silence rather than presence and action. Moltmann refers to this as "The appalling silence of the Father in response to the Son's prayer in Gethsemane" (1981, 77). However, Streufert reads Elaine Scarry's claim that silence can be a form of powerful resistance in order to offer a different perspective on silence. Speaking particularly of Jesus' silence to his accusers, Streufert claims that "Jesus' silence […] could indicate that Jesus gave no accommodation to the torturers; he gave them no power" (2010, 31). Of

[65] Such a notion provides the foundation for my claims in Chapter Four, wherein the practical expression of such tangible embodied presence, and its ability to both anticipate and create the future, is explored.

[66] Baker-Fletcher's reference to Jesus to exemplify this should not be overlooked and, as we shall shortly see, is crucial to reformulating divine power.

course, this reading should not be assumed to be typical of all silences, for it is true that women in particular have suffered from imposed silence and have fought for "the hard-won privilege of speech" (Pittenger, 2011, 96; cf. 98). Still, a God who feels and perceives our experiences could be seen to be present and active even in silence, insomuch as God is sharing in the experience of feeling alone and voiceless. Moreover, it could be that God's felt absence and silence is actually a mark of God's outrage at attempts to mask or quell God's presence. Woolley offers yet another interpretation of silence in her study of Christian women's practices of silence. Here, she notes a sense of agreement with Adrienne Rich that silence "should not be confused 'with any kind of absence'" (2013, 149). Instead, silence is variously interpreted as a place of coming to know God (2013, 152) and of finding oneself held in God (2013, 155). This further exemplifies how God is authentically affected by creation, for in addition to physically perceiving the experiences of creation God is here seen to create and inhabit spaces of silence in responsive acts of protest, empathy, and love.

A God who is so affected by creation is also inferred in passages such as Jeremiah 31.20 and Hosea 11.8. In these instances, we read about God being "deeply moved", and God's heart recoiling and compassion growing. In reference to such examples, Lewis observes that "The Impassible speaks as if it suffered passion, and that which contains in Itself the cause of its own and all other bliss as though it could be in want and yearning" (1940, 40). Lewis explains this as God choosing, out of love, to allow Godself to be so affected by humanity in an act of "humility that passes understanding" (1940, 39). Rather than an omnipotent God who is not affected in any significant way by creation, God puts Godself at risk for the sake of loving relationships. Moltmann puts this more succinctly, asserting that "A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. A God who cannot love is a dead God" (1981, 38; cf. Teilhard de Chardin, 1999, 192). God can only be God if God loves and loving entails, at times, suffering. Indeed, 1 John 4.8-10

claims that God *is* love, and goes on to speak of the extent of God's love as both the origin of all love and the basis of our salvation. Instead of this compromising God's power, this ability highlights the relational core of God's power. Furthermore, this does not compromise God's freedom, for as Zizioulas writes, "Love as God's mode of existence 'hypostasizes' God, *constitutes* His [*sic*.] being", such that "Love is identified with ontological freedom" (1985, 46). This suggests that God's power is made perfect in the freedom to be in loving relationships.[67] Thus, whilst the Christian tradition has consistently upheld God as omnipotent, this is here exposed as being *inconsistent* with the biblical depiction of a God who is deeply affected and changed by relationships with creation. God as love thus directs God's relational presence with creation which is manifest in God's openness to being authentically affected by creation.

By claiming that God is so authentically and substantially touched by creation I thus claim that the eschatological process must also be one which creation affects. God cannot be unaffected by creation and, accordingly, cannot realise the eschaton in a detached, impersonal manner; this is simply not how God's power works. Rather, because God's power is manifest in a genuine openness to empathising with and sharing in the experiences of creation, God actively opens the eschatological process to creaturely involvement and influence. This means that we can affect it for good or ill; we can bring joy or hurt to God as we bring joy or hurt to one another or ourselves. Accordingly, there must be another dimension to the eschatological process wherein we are afforded space and time to process our actions and experiences.[68] This has variously been depicted as a medicinal or pedagogic process (Origen as referenced by Ludlow, 2000, 32) or as an antidote to sin, according to Polkinghorne (2002, 132). In

[67] Such a concept will assist with considerations of God's freedom for relationships, and the eschaton as a "free(ing) process" for both God and creation, which will be addressed later on in this chapter.

[68] This is not to say that our existences in the future are of greater or lesser significance, depending on our actions. Some problems with this are noted later on in this chapter, with specific reference to some experiences of disabilities.

short, the process here is understood to be one in which experiences of damaging and hurtful actions are attended to, and the perpetrator is drawn to the embrace of a God who caresses them through a process of realisation. Such a process means that all can be included in eschatological life in such a way that both the causes and effects of hurts and pains are authentically acknowledged and transformed.[69]

God's Relational Response to Creation

Despite the reading of absence and silence noted above, there is a definite need to emphasise the tangible, visible, and audible nature of God's responsive presence. Wayne Morris explains that a God whose presence is not able to tangibly be perceived and experienced is, in fact, irrelevant to those who rely on such experiences (2008, 97). This adds further specificity to the claim that creation affects the eschatological process for it is not only, or even necessarily, our actions that determine the nature of God's response but also, and primarily, the particular nature of our embodied experiences. Speaking of the experiences of Deaf people, Morris writes that "For God to be accessible and relevant, he [*sic*.] must be a God who can be seen 'face to face' and whose presence can be touched and experienced" (2008, 97). John Hull adds to this that for Blind people, presence is communicated again by touch but also here by sound rather than sight (1990, 50). Though Hull is speaking of friend-to-friend relationships, combining this with Morris's claim illustrates how God must be understood to be physically responsive in particular ways depending on the experiences of the person to whom God responds. Morris adds further substance to this by referring to Thomas's encounter with Jesus whereby "Jesus invites Thomas to touch him". God, Morris claims, "knows how to relate to Deaf people and he [*sic*.] understands their culture" (2008, 152). As in my earlier presentation of Jantzen's argument, this understanding is predicated on God's experiential knowledge, thus it is appropriate to claim that God experiences

[69] Forgiveness may be an element of this, but there are instances where this is inappropriate, for creation at least. Some such instances are attended to in Chapter Four.

blindness and is therefore able to understand it and relate to those who are blind. However this is not a unilateral relation; it is not only the case that God invites touch but also actively moves to touch others; Morris explains that some Deaf people experience God's presence as feeling God's touch (2008, 153).[70] Again this signals the active nature of embodied presence and emphasises its personal and particular nature.

Furthermore, this helps us to rethink divine power as that which is tangibly shared in a responsive manner. The clearest and most beneficial examples we have for this are the stories in which women exercise courage to elicit a response from Jesus. Referring to the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5.21-34 and to the Syrophoenecian woman in Mark 7.25-28, Streufert (2010, 33) writes that:

> Both […] have the courage to claim from Jesus what they need. They had been invisible. They make themselves visible to Jesus and by doing so they help to reorder the dynamics of power.[71]

That the bleeding woman claimed this power through touching Jesus illustrates the embodied nature of Jesus' responsive presence; that the Syrophoenecian woman claimed this power by negotiating with Jesus illustrates the relational nature of Jesus' responsive presence. Both usurp patriarchal notions of power by actively seeking and visibly receiving Jesus' power, and moreover by causing Jesus to share his power. Brock similarly attends to the life of Jesus in order to illuminate this sense of shared power. Brock frames power as participatory, and she understands this to be characteristic of the type of power displayed by Jesus (1995, 84). This furthers some of the perspectives noted in Chapter One, which sought to de-center Jesus, as Brock claims that "The reality of erotic power within connectedness means it cannot be located in a single individual" (1995, 52) thus again making reference to the importance of power

[70] Again, this substantiates a positive reading of touch which will inform my centralisation of touch in Chapter Four.

[71] More specifically, Streufert is here referring to the haemorrhaging woman being healed by touching Jesus' cloak (Mark 5.27-29) and the Syrophoenecian woman's successful petitioning of Jesus to "cast the demon out of her daughter" (Mark 7.28-29).

being *shared*. She goes on to elucidate this by, like Streufert, referring to the story of the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5.21-34. Making note of Jesus' awareness "that power had gone forth from him" (Mark 5.30), Brock claims that this woman "takes away [Jesus'] patriarchal power as a man" by disrupting the social and religious barrier that separated him from her. In so doing, she claims, the woman "allows Jesus fuller participation in erotic power" for she facilitated the sharing of power (1995, 84). Divine power emerges here as the power to perceive *and respond* to the experiences and needs of others, both of which are practised in a tangible manner. Thus power is here increased as it is distributed in a relationally responsive manner.[72] This can, again, mean that the eschatological process is not realised by a divine exercise of power over creation but rather through divine openness to, presence with, and response to creation's experiences and actions, which is framed here as a proper reading of divine power. Of course, this must also pertain to a responsiveness to experiences and actions which seek to quell or reject God's relational presence. First, though, let us consider the nature of God's freedom.

God's Freedom for Relationships

In addition to feeling, and therefore responding, to our experiences in this way, and therein making manifest a particular form of power, it is crucial to maintain a sense of God's freedom in order that God not be depicted as bound and reduced to these experiences. This is of particular import when using the maternal metaphor in order to counter depictions of motherhood as an essentialised marker of femininity, and of freedom as inappropriate for women. Thus, God's maternal relating to creation must

[72] This reading of relational power as that which is shared will inform the readings of freedom that I will present later on in this chapter.

be understood as a free action.[73] Jürgen Moltmann's contribution is crucial to developing this construction, as he understands divine freedom not as the choice to love or not to love, but rather to be who God is; "in loving the world", Moltmann claims, "[God] is by no means 'his [*sic*.] own prisoner'; on the contrary in loving the world he [*sic*.] is entirely free because he [*sic*.] is entirely himself" (1993, 55). This has echoes of the perspective noted from Zizioulas earlier, and substantiates the claim that loving relationality thus epitomises the very nature of God. This could possibly be read as inferring the essential nature of maternal relationality, but the analogy is not so direct; rather the freedom God experiences is the freedom to be fully Godself, meaning that the freedom we experience is the freedom to be fully ourselves. Indeed, this may even counteract essentialised models of femininity that present motherhood as a requirement, for it instead upholds the integrity of individual and particular yearnings and futures.

In this understanding, power can be reframed as the power to be completely oneself in relationships. What this ultimately means is that God's power is expressed in God's free, loving action to relate to creation and thus, to a certain degree, depend on creation. Basselin (2011, 53) reads this in the following way:

> Scripture is clear that God is more powerful than human beings, yet it is not through our understandings of power that the Word becomes flesh. Rather, it is the power of limitation, humility, vulnerability – a baby is born, fragile and completely dependent.

This recalls the notion of God being genuinely affected by relationships with creation, and illustrates the fluidity and utility of the maternal metaphor, for God here becomes the child who depends on creation. Again this emphasises the way in which God is genuinely affected by creation and adds to this that such willingness to be affected is

[73] This also has implications for thinking about our own freedom; if our experiences are legitimate bases from which to think about God then God's freedom can speak back to our own and tell us that freedom is to become relationally proximate to God. This is a claim that will be developed later in this chapter.

the free action of God's love for creation.[74] This must be balanced, however, with my next consideration (that is, the construction of God as more than creation) lest such a model actually result in the disempowerment of God; that is, the characterisation of God as indistinguishable from creation. Indeed, Moltmann reads the free action of God to feel creation as being indicative of the process through which God both suffers with creation and "becomes their advocate". For Moltmann this is necessarily eschatological as it leads to God "throwing open" creation's future to them (1993, 56). Thus, God's free action to relate to creation signifies God's desire to draw creation into the fullness of such relations in the eschatological future.

God's Relational Help for Creation

In addition to God depending on creation, then, God is also presented here as one upon whom we can depend; who can offer help to us. A beneficial way to understand this concept of God is by considering God's transcendence. Grace Jantzen seeks to hold together God's immanence and transcendence; she does this by re-imagining the eternity of God in terms of "omnitemporality", that is, "saying that God endures forever, throughout time" as opposed to without or outside of time (1984a, 45). Such reconfiguring counters the traditional prioritising of the infinite over the finite, the transcendent over the immanent, and instead suggests that God is not either one or the other, but can be both, without contradiction.[75] We remember that Jantzen proposes a God who is both infinite and immanent, and we can develop this here by observing that this is not an immanence that is predicated by or dependent on transcendence. Rather,

[74] This also further counteracts the depiction of God as omnipotent, for as Pamela Sue Anderson notes, notions of love have been distorted by the image of an omnipotent God which have promoted a "gender ideal" of love as dominance and control (2012, 90).

[75] This exemplifies Jantzen's concern to overturn and transform binaries, as opposed to simply reversing them (Graham, 2009a, 4). Such concerns are similarly upheld here in my desire to hold together God's presence with and help for creation, instead of depicting the two as oppositional entities. This overturning of binary ways of thinking is a consistent feature of this thesis, and is continued in the universalistic slant of my proposals in this chapter, as will later be seen.

Jantzen defines this as existing within but not being reduced to the spatio-temporal (1984a, 125). God's immanence and transcendence are thus simultaneous; are part of the same reality. Through retaining this element of transcendence in God's relationships to creation, God emerges as one upon whom we can depend, for in addition to being intimately related to creation it is also feasible to maintain that God remains more than creation, and thus able to help creation.[76] Indeed, the divine co-suffering and empathy that was earlier said to typify God's embodied and tangible relationships with creation can be seen as not exhausting or incapacitating God, for as Jantzen claims, "God can cope with more than we can" (1984a, 84). Such a notion is embodied in one woman's understanding of God's presence in the conflicts in Northern Ireland. This woman speaks of being stuck in the middle of situations and feeling as though she was being "pulled apart". God though, she claims, "can stay in the middle and survive" (Porter, 2013, 99). This suggests that God's power is manifest in God's compassionate co-experience of suffering *and* God's ability to be more than that suffering.

Again, the maternal metaphor can help us to develop this understanding. Carolyn Bohler (1997, 29) explicates the maternal metaphor used here by paralleling it with her own experiences, as she writes:

> As a nursing mother who considered myself unable to be more exhausted, I clung to the image of Nursing Mother God who would feed me and give me sustenance at the same time that I held our daughter in my arms, feeding her. I had considered being in the Womb of God while my womb held the growing fetus.

Alison, a respondent in Woolley's study, similarly speaks of her experience of being pregnant as revealing to her a God who holds her in love (2013, 155). In these two examples, we not only see the self-depletion and exhaustion that can typify experiences

[76] Furthermore, this prevents maternal readings of God from upholding framings of maternal relations as self-depleting. Instead, it presents mothering as an agential action, which indicates God's ability to actuate help for creation. There are, however, problems relating to freedom when considering dependence; these will be addressed in the next section of this chapter.

of motherhood, but also the significance of God being imaged as one upon whom we can depend; who does not tire of the relationship and continually moves to uphold and hold us in that relationship. Such a sentiment is shared by Julian of Norwich, who claims Jesus as our Mother and therein asserts that "though our earthly mother may suffer her child to perish, our heavenly Mother, Jesus, may not suffer us that are his children to perish" (1927, 151). This should not be read as inferring that God is now a supernatural figure of motherhood, whose mothering makes all other mothers pale in comparison. If so, this would merely perpetuate problems with traditional images of God as Father. Instead, we remember the emphasis that has been placed here on rethinking power in terms of its sharedness. Thus, God is not a super-heroine of motherhood but rather a mother who radically reverses assumptions of power and shares her power so that we may all experience the relational help of God. Thus, whilst God as mother can transcend and transform our difficulties, this is predicated on God entering, feeling, and sharing them. Indeed, Reinhard, citing Heimmel, notes that Julian of Norwich does not present a slight on mothers or a rejection of their motherhood, but rather an affirmation of the inclusion of "our earthly mother" into the actions, relations, and intentions of God (2007, 634). This simultaneous appreciation and projection of motherhood in God echoes my earlier claim, made in reference to Raphael's presentation of the sometime burden of relationships in the Holocaust; such relationships are understood here to be both felt by God in all of their difficulty but also transcended and transformed by God in God's ability to offer relational help within such situations.

This reading of God as physically and relationally perceiving and responding to creation, whilst also remaining more than creation, means that God both desires and is able to help creation to experience the fullness of relationality in the eschatological future. It is because God so experiences creation that God desires to help creation and

does so in a relational manner. Indeed, such help can actually be said to constitute an important element of God's responsive relationship to creation. The presentist dimensions of this have already been communicated as divinely embodied presence which is manifest in perceiving and responding to personal experiences. However, the understanding of God as both immanent and transcendent again resurfaces, and enables an eschatological reading of help. Mayra Rivera sees relationality as typical of transcendence for she claims that transcendence is not predicated on God's exteriority to creation but on God's relational involvement with creation (2007, 45). God's transcendence within creation can, in this way, be read as pertaining to the ability to both sustain present relationships and birth creation to the full experience of relationality. It is precisely because God is relational in the way claimed thus far that God desires to help us into this full experience of relationality, which I propose means unhindered and universal presence with God and with other members of creation. Julian of Norwich, again, also seems to uphold this twofold emphasis on God, in Jesus, both feeling and helping or "feeding" us. With reference once more to the motherhood of Jesus, Julian asserts that "Jesus is our very Mother, not feeding us with milk, but with himself; opening his side to us, and challenging all of our love" (1927, 123). Reinhard reads Jesus' open side as signifying his penetrable body; at once receptive, enveloping, and nourishing (2007, 636-638).[77] Further to this, Meg, a respondent in Nicola Slee's study of women's faith development, tells of how her experience of motherhood mediated her experience of interrelationship with God. Here, the self is both "feeding and fed, denied and affirmed, offered and received" (Slee, 2004b, 127). These readings of relationality can help us to formulate a model of God that encompasses both vulnerable sentience to creation and active help for creation without contradiction. This is what Russell calls the "radical help" that God provides humanity with, in order

[77] Reinhard also refers to this as "the tactile way in which humanity is united to Christ her mother" (2007, 636), which further substantiates Chapter Four's focus on relational tactility as a way of embodying both God and the eschaton.

that they "find their way back into the circle of humanity with other human beings and with God" (1982a, 80). Given God's involvement with creation, any failure to finally and fully realise such relationality would be contradictory to God's very self which is characterised by the free action to be relationally present to creation.

God's Relational Help for All of Creation

God's loyalty to relational presence with and for creation necessitates an eschatological fullness of relationality in order that this loyalty be fulfilled, then. Fulfilment, to reiterate, means uncompromised experiences of presence but in addition to this it must also mean the universal experience of such presence. There are questions to be asked here concerning the coherence of such universality with creaturely freedom, and these will be attended to in the next section of this chapter. Before this, though, it is necessary to expound the claim that God's relational presence with creation must ultimately mean that God desires to and will help *all* of creation to experience full relationality. God's love and loyalty are integral to understanding this. Hartshorne (2001, 110-111) reads changelessness through the lens of Whitehead's presentation of the primordial nature of God, and claims that it may thus be thought of as:

> all-penetrating love. At no time is God without interest in and benevolent toward his [*sic.*] creatures as existent at that time. The changeless character of God is his absolute loyalty.

This can support the notion that part of God's intimate relationships with creation is a loyal commitment to making that intimacy ultimate; God is never not loyal to, interested in, or loving towards creation and thus cannot logically be content with a future in which full relationality is not experienced by all. Delio further explains this by claiming that "It is precisely the relational nature of God as love that begs the question whether or not creation is eternal, since love implies a commitment to the other" (2005, 280). Commitment here is not simply that which is experienced in the present; it also signifies an enduring commitment. Again, this is not an exercise in God exerting

power over creation; this is simply not the kind of power that God experiences. Rather, God's power is found in God's relational presence to creation which is both open to being affected by creation and committed to helping all of creation to experience full relationality.

Relationality must ultimately be realised for all, then, in order that God's love and loyalty not ultimately and eternally be frustrated and compromised. Letty Russell expresses a similar perspective when she states that "The gift [of God's love] is for everyone" (1979a, 175). God's love and the eschatological fulfilment of relationality are inseparable, then, and it is out of love that God not only desires all of creation to experience full relationality, but that God ultimately can do no other. Moltmann concurs, and citing 1 Corinthians 15, he claims that Paul's concern is "*the universal glorification of God.* This embraces the *universal reconciliation* of human beings and the *bringing again of all things* into the new creation. Otherwise God would not be God" (2010, 141; cf. 1992, 118; 1989, 67).[78] This is further substantiated by Pinnock's reading of Revelation 22.2 which relays John's vision of a river flowing with life and a tree blossoming with life. The tree's leaves, it is said, are "for the healing of the nations", and verse three goes on to say that "Nothing accursed will be found there anymore". Pinnock reads this to mean that "God is not going to give up on the nations that fought and resisted him [*sic*.] and persecuted his [*sic*.] people so cruelly", and this communicates God's universal and relentless love, for Pinnock. He continues: "God will finally win victory over them, not through naked power, but through boundless love" (1992, 34-35). Whilst the language of victory is problematic given its associations with conquest, we can nevertheless use Pinnock's assertion to acquire a sense of the eschaton being brought about not by domineering power but by relentless love.

[78] It seems here that Moltmann is paying particular attention to the assertions that "as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Corinthians 15.22) and, later, that this must happen "so that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15.28).

Accordingly, a relational eschatological process can draw relationships to their fulfilment not only in their quality but also in their quantity. Loving divine presence will be encountered fully (though differently) by every individual in the collective experience of the eschaton.

The propensity for divine love to be universal is a notion supported by many feminist theologians, albeit not always in a future-eschatological sense given the problems already noted with future-oriented eschatology. Marit Trelstad, for example, insists on the unmerited, uncontrollable love of God for creation (2006, 121), arguing for "Love, fully offered again and again, regardless of our attempts to reject or kill it" (2006, 124). This relentlessness can legitimately be conceived of in relation to the eschatological future, and indeed some women have subscribed to such imaginings. Sarah Apetrei highlights the marginal but compelling voices of Elizabeth Bathurst and M. Marsin, who both sought to articulate a universalist understanding of the eschatological future. Of Bathurst, Apetrei explains: "She could not accept that God could be 'so partial in his [*sic*.] Love towards his Creatures, as to choose some, but leave the greatest part of Mankind [*sic*.] in the fallen state'" (2009, 136).[79] Moreover, Apetrei (2009, 143) notes that both Bathurst and Marsin read this universalism as having an especially political impact, albeit an impact that was somewhat restricted to ecclesiastical life:

> If the heathen, the infant and the ignorant could be encompassed by grace, how much more were barriers to the ministry of godly women removed. The election of men for dominant religious roles seemed to [Bathurst and Marsin] as arbitrary as ordaining the smallest part of humanity for salvation.

[79] Of course, the masculine language used here, and other language used by the two thinkers, is problematic. Still, as we shall later see with contributions that refer to the 'Kingdom of God', such language does not render the ideas redundant or entirely unhelpful, even if such language is rejected.

For these thinkers, then, grace was understood to be ultimately indiscriminate and as such could not be arbitrarily dispensed to select individuals in the here and now.[80] As such, whilst steeped in the language of the historical context in which Bathurst and Marsin wrote, and presenting a somewhat limited understanding of the social impact of a universalist idea of salvation, these two thinkers illustrate the feasibility of synthesising universalist eschatological images with present concerns for affirming the full participation and inclusion of women in relationships with the divine. Indeed, much feminist theological thought upholds a sustained rejection of dualistic structures that define and dichotomise beings as good or bad, and this finds especial resonance with universalist images. A God who finally and fully realises relationship for all can be conceived of as one who honours the particularity of individuals whilst rejecting the value-laden separation of individuals. That this is realised *for all of creation* again emphasises the usurping of dichotomous constructions by synthesising both particularity and universality in the eschatological process.

It is both a logical deduction and a biblical assertion, then, to claim that God's love for and loyalty to creation necessitates the inclusion of all in the eschatological experience of relational presence. If this is not experienced fully (meaning both in intensity and universality) then God is not actually loving, ultimately not loyal, and creation eternally deprived. We would all, including God, eternally suffer, for as Talbott writes "if [God's] love is infinitely greater than ours, then his [*sic.*] own suffering over the loss of a single loved one would likewise be infinitely greater than our own" (Talbott, 2003, 17). Our creaturely experiences of love communicate to us that eternal alienation from our loved ones would be unbearable, and this can inform our conceptions of God. Again, if God is so affected by our actions and experiences then God's empathetic "feeling with"

[80] Norman Wirzba offers an interesting observation in relation to understandings of grace by explaining the similarities in the Hebrew word for grace (*hēn*) and the life-giving womb (*rehem*) (2008, 238). This again draws us back to the legitimacy of a model of God's intimate and embodied relational love for and loyalty to creation.

creation and loving "power for" creation can help us to conclude that God would both suffer over any severing of relationships with creation and would actively move to remedy this by helping all into the full and final experience of relationality in the eschaton.

Such a reading of divine power as the relational response to help all of creation finally and fully experience relationality does, however, lead to questions of why this is eschatological and not realised immediately. There are certainly situations where this would not only be welcome but crucial. If this help is delayed then we are reverted back to the problems noted in Chapter One; namely that God appears callous and unconcerned with present struggles. However, I have here presented a case for a God who is relationally perceptive and responsive *both* in the present and in the future. It is because God relates like this in the present that God must also relate like this in the future *and* that that future must be realised in accordance. In short, the future must be one that we can genuinely affect and that God, through loyalty, can help us to achieve. The model I have presented of God's relational presence as both perceptive and responsive has elucidated the claim that God *does* offer help now. Nevertheless, there are undoubtedly situations where God is not experienced as relationally and helpfully perceptive and responsive. In such circumstances, the model of eschatology proposed here can offer not an excuse, as Keller's critique of traditional eschatologies claims, but rather an alternative perspective. This perspective can reveal that God is never not *for* creation, thus will never abandon creation, in the present as much as in the future. As this chapter earlier claimed, God's apparent absence can instead be understood as God's proximity to the pain of desolation, such that God shares in and truly feels the experience of feeling alone and abandoned. Again, God is thus one to whom we can authentically relate for God truly understands our sufferings. Moreover, given the rejection of divine omnipotence, this is not a God who invades present circumstances in

order to exercise power over them and thus change them. Instead, this is a God who accompanies us even in the loneliest of places; as Psalm 139.7-12 confirms, God is indeed omnipresent and does not abandon us even if we find ourselves in the darkest and most distant places:

> If I take the wings of the morning
> and settle at the farthest limits of
> the sea,
> even there your hand shall lead me,
> and your right hand shall hold me fast.
> If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall
> cover me,
> and the light around me become
> night',
> even the darkness is not dark to you;
> the night is as bright as the day,
> for darkness is as light to you (9-12).

A similar sensing of God's presence is expressed by one of the participants in Slee's study; here, Marion conveys a feeling that God is "always there available…even in the darkness and desolation" (2004b, 141). God's unfailingly intimate presence in the eschaton does not diminish experiences of a perceived lack of presence in the present, then, but instead it helps us to alter our perceptions in accordance with the promise of perpetual divine presence. In so doing, we can strive to reflect on our perceptions of divine absence and strive to perceive, instead, a different kind of presence. This may be a quieter and gentler presence than we may have thought or even desired, but it is, nonetheless, a powerful presence.

Still, if God is both willing and able to offer help to *finally* realise this full experience of relationality we may continue to ask why this is not *fully* experienced now; what it is that prevents God from actuating this fullness in its entirety now. However, the very fact that it is not realised now signals that God is honouring the process. Returning to the maternal metaphor, there must be a process of gestation before there can be birth; there is, indeed, "a time for every matter" (Ecclesiastes 3.1). The unpredictability of the precise moment of birth does not mean that we cannot now feel its joy, for just as God

is affected by, feels, and relates to us we too can be affected by, feel, and relate to God and perceive the type of relationship we will be birthed to in the eschaton. It is possible to detect a similar eschatological reading of relationality in the work of Mayra Rivera (2007, 137), who conceives of God opening creation up to "relational infinity". She writes:

> A God who knows (in the broadest sense of the term) each and every creature […] embraces each one of them and is touched by each one in her/his own singularity – caressing and calling the particularity of each and every creature to its new births.[81]

Such a perspective enables a reading of the eschatological process not as realised by an omnipotent God through triumphalism and conquest, but rather by every individual experience of creation affecting God and God affecting all of creation in a dynamic interplay of maternal relationality. This embracing body of God does not confine, Rivera explains (2007, 135), and I add to this that the tactile openness of God's embrace creates a space wide enough for the process to take time, and intimate enough to gently caress us toward involvement in the process. This is a body that holds and helps, certainly, but one that does so in relationship with the one who is held and helped. This means that whilst God's embrace can take care of creation, it cannot do so independently of the effects and existences of creation. Creation remains agential even as God embraces and caresses it to true, full freedom.

## Creaturely Freedom

### The Case for Freedom

Even so, more must be said about freedom if this remodelling of the eschatological process is to be at all feasible; questions remain in this universalistic model (as, indeed, in most models of universalism) concerning the experiences of those who may not want to affect or be affected by God, and the role of choice in this (for those who either

[81] This highlights the simultaneous particular and universal nature of the eschaton which will be elaborated in the next chapter, as I attend, in more depth than has been alluded to thus far, to the possibility and meaning of *particular* bodies enduring in the eschaton.

cannot or do not wish to make choices). Before these questions are addressed, though, we should explore why the question of freedom is pertinent to this discussion. As we will see in more depth momentarily, Jantzen (1984b, 39), Baker-Fletcher (2006, 83), and Keller (2003b, 422), claim that for love to be possible freedom must be authentic. Ultimately this means, for these thinkers, that no final, universal eschatological future is possible, as it would remove the possibility of freely refusing participation or existence in that future. Emphasis here is placed on creaturely agency and decision-making, and the necessary preservation of both in order that relationships of freedom are honoured. The critique that this offers of eschatology is, in short, that the end cannot justify the means; if the end result is loving relationality, the means by which this is achieved must also be loving. If this is to be at all possible, it is claimed, creation must always be free to express agency and responsiveness, even if this manifests itself in the refusal of relationship.

Attentiveness to freedom emerges as particularly relevant for a specifically feminist remodelling of the eschatological process, for just as relationality has been constructed as the domain of women, so too has freedom been framed dualistically as the sole possession of men. Christ (2003, 184-185) extrapolates the details of this, noting that:

> Traditionally, individual freedom has been a male prerogative, while women have been told that we must give up our desires for individual human freedom in order to meet the needs of husbands and children.

The omnipotent God of traditional eschatology, modelled on patriarchal understandings of power, is thus exposed here as perpetuating gendered definitions of freedom and relationality; the suggestion seems to be that women cannot be free and must settle with their supposedly appropriately inferior experience of relationality. That such relationality is understood by feminist theologians to be abstracted from traditional models of divinity only confirms its inferiority. Such understandings of freedom both benefit from and add credence to a model of divine omnipotence which

depicts creaturely freedom as illusory and impossible. The observation that not only God but also freedom have been constructed in male terms, and have been assigned exclusively to men, makes the divine diminishing of freedom even more problematic. Furthermore, an omnipotent God, and the future created by such a God, is deemed by these thinkers not only to compromise human freedom but also to care little for it, such that any of creation's experiences and actions appear inconsequential to the life of the divine.

Whilst I have here presented a God who *does* care for creation and, further still, is genuinely affected by relationships with creation, some problems remain particularly with regards to freedom. The perspectives noted above illustrate that the remodelling I have presented of God as involved with but also more than and capable of helping creation to final, full experiences of relationality, can also potentially jeopardise creaturely autonomy. God, in this understanding, could be accused of retaining an ability to actuate a specific future for us; affected by the experiences of creation and regarding their choices but not, ultimately or significantly, altering the course or character of the future in relation to them. Such an understanding still requires God to be in complete and ultimate possession of all power. This is developed by Keller, who writes that "No matter how perfect, beautiful, and joyful is the restoration, if it *finally* overrides the agency of the creature and its capacity to respond in love then the reconstitution is *a work not of love but of dominance*" (2003b, 422). Continuing the emphasis on human freedom, Jantzen similarly concludes that "surely if there is freedom there is always the possibility of refusal" (Jantzen, 1984b, 39). Eschatological indeterminacy thus connotes eschatological risk; if there is to be an eschatological future at all, the suggestion here is that human freedom would thwart any *universal* future. This is echoed by Karen Baker-Fletcher who claims that God certainly has "loving desire for the world" but will not force us to participate in this, such that "The

potential to choose the opposite of God's aim for the well-being of creation is a risk entailed in the freedom that is inherent in all of life" (2006, 83).[82] What is prioritised by these thinkers, then, is the integrity of creaturely freedom to make authentic decisions; this is deemed to be "choked off" by divine power which is framed as total control (Keller, 2003b, 415). This suggests that our concern should not be with what kind of future we will experience, but rather with whether that future was our own decision: neither determined or known by God.

Such perspectives further suggest that even if God finally realises an existence that seems to be characterised by love, it cannot actually be so for God has therein acted upon creation with no regard or need for creaturely agency. Brock and Parker define this framing of power as "benevolent paternalism" (2008, 422), and Brock's earlier work exposes the insufficiency of such benevolence. She writes that "if we choose some element of domination, no matter how benevolent, we reduce the presence of the other in the relationship and diminish the creativity of connection" (1995, 39). Elizabeth Johnson detects a similar problem; we remember her earlier-noted assertion that "Benevolent patriarchy is still patriarchy" (2002, 34). It seems, then, that even if eschatology is framed as entirely egalitarian, as "God's relational help for *all* of creation", the problem remains that this requires a God who finally exercises power over creation. As such, any final future, in this understanding, cannot actually be "perfect, beautiful, and joyful" for it compromises the integrity of creation and confirms the dominance of God.

Not only this, though; universal understandings in any form are understood to be problematic for their proximity to and perpetuation by colonial and imperialistic forces. Grace Jantzen, for instance, proposes that notions of universal salvation are

[82] It should be noted that despite appearances here, Baker-Fletcher does maintain a sense of finality by claiming that, in the end, all will recognise God's authority in Jesus (2006, 145).

founded on particularly Christian understandings of salvation. This means, for Jantzen, that universal salvation presents Christianity as a universal truth, which is deeply problematic when confronted with difference in any forms and particularly with religious pluralism (1998, 168). This is echoed by Vine Deloria, who understands such perspectives as actually espousing a "universal imperialism" (in Ruether, 2002, 210). Given the feminist critique of universalistic claims that have commonly underpinned gender theory and theology, as noted in the Introduction, an eschatology that is final even if, or especially if, it is for all, is charged with perpetuating this myth of universality. Essentially, it claims an homogenous future defined by one dominant perspective *and* relies on a domineering God to effect it. We see similar problems resurfacing here then: whilst I have significantly rethought the eschatological process, my model thus far could be charged with compromising both difference and freedom. This critique substantiates the earlier noted critique from Christ; namely that omnipotence compromises relationality and freedom.

Thus, even if the eschatological process is reconstructed on the basis of divine-creation relationality, if the *finality* of this is ultimately achieved by God, then it is deemed to be no less problematic than, and even too closely akin to, an omnipotent God who controls the trajectory of creation. I have begun to challenge this critique by claiming that an eschatological God is not an omnipotent God; this chapter's attempts at reconfiguring divine power in relation to the eschatological process have emphasised the relational nature of both. Therein, I argued that if God did not finally help creation to realise full relationality then God's relational love for creation would forever be frustrated, God's loyalty to relationships with creation would ultimately be compromised, and creation's ability to experience unfettered and abundant relationality would be thwarted. Thus, God's eschatological help was understood in terms of a shared power which empowers creation to embrace the full and final experience of relationality with one another, with

oneself, and with God. As such, both God and creation are enabled finally to enter into the full experience of relationality which is both constructed and glimpsed in the present when we build relationships which mirror such eschatological fullness.

"The Torment of Choice"[83]

However, it is possible to take the challenge further, and make my case more legitimate, by being attentive to the diversity of experiences within creation. Such attentiveness challenges the above-noted theologians' readings of freedom, and also addresses their claims that "universality" necessarily overlooks and even thwarts difference and diversity. A beneficial place to begin is with questioning the alignment of choice and agency with freedom, for what is suggested here is that creation must always be free to choose to respond to or refuse God. This complete alignment of freedom with response and refusal is inappropriate as it fails to account for those who do not have the capacity or ability to make such decisions.[84] Morris (2011, 126) calls this the "tyranny of salvation" whereby God is presented as one who will only save those who respond in faith. He continues:

> Such an understanding of salvation could only lead us to conclude that people with certain learning and intellectual disabilities could not be saved because they would not have the capacity to know intellectually anything of Christ's salvific work or have a faith that could be explicitly expressed to others through language.

[83] Moltmann refers to the "torment of choice" between good and evil, "with its torments and threats", as a lesser freedom when compared with the freedom which desires only good (1993, 55). Although I present a slightly different reading of freedom, I concur with Moltmann's critique of depicting choice as the sole determinant of freedom.

[84] Christ makes an important observation that "Unfortunately there are many people in the world whose freedom is so limited that [...] it might seem meaningless to speak about creative freedom to them or, worse, insensitive to their real needs" (Christ, 2003, 179; cf. Jantzen, 1998, 259). In light of this, it may seem that my ensuing discussion of freedom is not mindful of the lived experiences of those who do not have the freedom to even contemplate freedom. However, my overriding purpose is to respond to feminist theological critiques of the ways in which traditional Christian understandings denied freedom to women, and subsequently to propose an eschatological vision that rethinks freedom as something that should and will be experienced by all. My explorations here are not, then, ignorant of such experiences. On the contrary, I am mindful of their experiences of the curtailment of freedom, and seek to affirm the quest for and possibility of freedom.

Choice cannot, then, be upheld as the sole defining feature of ultimate freedom, as this suggests that those who are not able to choose are likewise incapable of experiencing freedom. Similarly, choice cannot be constructed as a prerequisite for inclusion into the eschatological future as this creates an exclusive model of eschatology that only serves to further marginalise those who do not, or cannot, experience decision-making.[85] Indeed, claiming that the absence of choice in the future means redemption will be an act of dominance runs the risk of reproducing such dominance; such a claim bears the potential to normalise those who have the ability to choose, and construct any others as deviant or somehow lacking. Not only does this have implications for certain individuals with learning and intellectual disabilities, but it also calls into question the inclusion of infants and non-human animals in the eschatological future. This potentially compromises the interrelationality of creation, suggesting that the eschatological future can possibly be true for some but not for all. Placing such importance on the ability to choose only justifies such exclusivity. It is inappropriate, then, to claim that absence of "the capacity to respond" means that God's final, eschatological act of power for creation will necessarily be an act of dominance.

Such readings of choice and agency, and the inference that they alone connote freedom, are further problematised by their suggestion that freedom resides in the capacity to be self-determining.[86] The claim here is that the essence of freedom is the ability to be the sole determining factor in one's own existence. Moltmann, for instance, claims that what is often being communicated in talk of self-determination is essentially one's

[85] This is not to assume that all individuals with learning or intellectual disabilities experience an inability to make decisions. Jean Vanier, through his work with people with intellectual disabilities, notes how one young woman, Claudia, "had to learn that she [...] could make choices, however small" and that this was a loving act of empowerment for Claudia (1999, 27). Thus, it is also necessary to recognise that the space and ability to make choices can be a facet of freedom and can affect the eschatological process, hence this chapter's later efforts to appreciate this.

[86] Again, out of an appreciation for diverse experiences, it should be noted that freedom *may* be understood and experienced as self-determination; such perspectives are attended to later in this chapter. The contention here is that, given the experiences noted, it cannot be the sole defining feature of freedom.

"freedom [to] rule over oneself" (1992, 115). Again, Morris's response sheds light on the inappropriateness of such understandings. With reference to his work within the Deaf community, Morris notes that whilst for some, the ability to be self-determining may indeed connote freedom, for others it is trust in community that allows for true freedom (2011, 133). Such alternative readings of freedom will be engaged with in more depth shortly, for there remain some other, associated difficulties that need addressing here. In addition to the inappropriateness of upholding self-determination as the only feature of freedom, there are also undertones of mastery in the alignment of freedom with choice and agency: the individual is deemed to be free if they are unaffected by any other and, accordingly, affected only by themselves. Moltmann (1992, 117) makes this observation, noting that:

> Even when we say: a person is free if he [*sic.*] is not determined by any inward or external compulsions, we are interpreting freedom as mastery – as a person's mastery over himself [*sic.*].

Freedom here is defined as isolation and complete separateness from any other. Moreover, this definition seems to be rooted in fear of the other, that is, fear that encountering any other being may curtail one's own ability, even right, to be the master of one's own destiny. This merely serves to perpetuate the view that "all that is not the self impinges on essential freedom and must therefore be conquered and contained" (Smith, 1989, 150). Here the individual's own freedom, understood as self-determinism, is necessarily given priority over the freedom of others and justifies a violent response to the other. Individual freedom, in this understanding, is achieved at the expense of another's freedom. This understanding of freedom is too akin to understandings of power as possession and is, accordingly, challenged by the notion of authentic power as that which is shared. Along these lines, freedom should similarly be rethought in terms of it being shared in and for relationality.

The "individual freedom" that is inferred by emphasising self-determinism cannot be uncritically upheld as a hallmark of freedom, then. If an individual's "freedom" curtails or diminishes the freedom of another it is not true freedom; as Letty Russell contends, "none of us is completely free until all are free" (1982a, 92; cf. Grey, 1989, 7). This exposes "individual freedom" as being the desire to form an existence that is exterior to community and relationality. Such rejections of relationality were, earlier in this chapter and concurrent with many feminist theological voices, critiqued as being inappropriate for our understandings of God. They are therefore also inappropriate for understandings of humanity. I earlier claimed that relationality typifies creation, and Ackermann (1998, 18) adds to this that we cannot understand humanity apart from relationality:

> My humanity is found, shaped, and nurtured in and through the humanity of others. I can only exercise my humanity by being in relationship with others and there is no happiness, growth, or fulfilment for me apart from other human beings.

Surely "happiness, growth" and "fulfilment" are more beneficial, accurate, and appropriate measures of freedom than isolation and individualism, which are the progeny of the desire to be entirely self-determining. Whist one can certainly exist in isolation, this is only ever *existence*: it is neither a reflection of true or fulfilled being. Indeed, Soskice explains that being in relationships with others actually draws one into their true being (2007, 175-6). It is interdependence, then, and not autonomy, that characterises relationality and freedom in those relationships. A life which is shared with others in relationship, then, is indicative of freedom much in the same way that power is properly understood to be shared rather than possessed. The power of relationality is manifest in communal sharing of life for the purpose of experiencing and helping all to experience freedom. "Individual freedom" thus emerges as a contradictory concept, for true freedom can never be the domain of the individual alone but must always be for, with, and in relationship with others. The individual is not only retained and affirmed here, but positively celebrated, as individuals are brought into

the fullness of their particular existences in relationships with other individuals. It is thus more beneficial to strive for freedom in relationships, than to attempt to be free apart from relationships, as such freedom has the capacity to bring us all more fully into who we are, both now and in the future.

This is given further clarity and confirmation by Basselin who, again, attends to the experiences of disabled people in order to "deconstruct societal and theological ideals of self-sufficiency and autonomy" and present new ideals of "vulnerability, weakness, and dependency" (2011, 47). Subscribing to the latter, he claims, signifies a willingness to "experience the freedom of non-autonomy and communal-sufficiency" (2011, 55). In direct contrast to the earlier noted perspectives, autonomy is here constructed as non-freedom whereas dependence on and vulnerability to others in relationships is presented as authentic freedom. This is not to say that disability is to be unequivocally paralleled with vulnerability. Rather, Basselin seems to be claiming that when associations are made between disability and vulnerability, these should not be devalued and framed as powerlessness but rather as the essence of relationality. Whenever any member of creation expresses a willingness to be vulnerable with another, then, we see the essence of full relationality. This means that such relationships with God can be not only present manifestations of freedom but also anticipatory ones. Indeed, the process of coming to full freedom in the eschaton is not severed from the present but occurs in the present when we cultivate relationships of care and openness and experience the well-being and flourishing that such relations can produce. Far from being averse to freedom, then, opening oneself up to God's own openness to us, and therein depending on God for the full realisation of relationality, actually connotes the most authentic experience of freedom.

It is possible to develop this further still, and claim that this relationality not only draws us into authentic freedom but also into our own humanity. The contribution from Ackerman noted above touches on this by highlighting that relationships are the crux upon and within which we are able to develop and uncover our own and each other's humanity. Thus, when I speak of being drawn into freedom through relationality, what this means is that we are drawn into becoming and being who we truly are. Vanier (1999, 117) adds clarity to this assertion by claiming that:

> To be free is to know who we are, with all that is beautiful, all the brokenness in us; it is to love our own values, to embrace them, and to develop them; it is to be anchored in a truth but also to be open to others and so to change.

Thus, being free here means being open and vulnerable in relationships with others, in such a way that we do not fear but rather welcome the changes that they may effect on us.[87] As Norman Wirzba writes, "'to be' is always already 'to be in relation' with others. Life simply is being in relation, being 'in touch' with others" (2008, 235). A relational presence that is open to change and to being in touch with others can, then, be said to characterise the eschatological process. Not only can we be involved in this process, but we can also benefit from it as we develop relationships that sustain and nurture ourselves and each other. This informs the very nature of the eschatological future that the process draws us towards, and also the ways in which we can both create and anticipate such a future in the present, as the ensuing chapters will explore.

Still, even expressing a willingness to be open and vulnerable presupposes the ability to make such expressions. This raises another issue with reading freedom as self-determination as it draws parallels with the ability for self-representation. Although, reading Nancy Eiesland (1994, 64), Hans Reinders notes that self-representation

[87] Of course, being so open to the effects of others is not without its risks and dangers; the practical implications and outworkings of such relational presence and openness will be thoroughly explored when this thesis moves to discuss such practicality in Chapter Four.

typifies a disability-rights approach, Reinders detects problems with such an emphasis. He writes (2008, 168) that:

> human beings incapable of self-representation have no place in this strategy. They are dependent on being represented by others, but this dependency is part of the problem of their marginalization.

Offering a reappraisal of dependence, in the above noted manner, goes some way to addressing such views of dependence. Furthermore, Eiesland's and Reinders's differing approaches here illustrate the complexities in negotiating the meaning of freedom, for whilst the space to be self-determining and to engage in self-representation are certainly markers of freedom for some, the naming of these as hallmarks of freedom marginalises those who cannot participate in such actions. This means that an adequate model of freedom in the eschatological process must both make space for choice whilst also contemplating the meaning of freedom when such choosing is not possible or perhaps not even desired.

Space for Choice

Whilst it is inappropriate, for reasons noted, to define choice as either the sole hallmark of freedom or a prerequisite to inclusion in the eschatological future, an eschatological process which honours particularity must also honour the fact that the ability to make real decisions may, for some, be an aspect of their freedom. Indeed, the removal or delegitimisation of the ability to make choices has often been used as a tool of oppression. It is understandable, then, that agency is understood by some to be concomitant with freedom. Any compromising of "freedom" is especially problematic for feminist theology. We remember that it perpetuates the presentation of the male as belonging in the domain of the intellectual ability to make decisions and, accordingly, the promotion of the female as passive and not able or entitled to partake in authentic decision-making. In addition to the problems already noted, then, to claim that choice

has no place in freedom potentially perpetuates the damaging perception that agency is an inappropriate desire, particularly for women.

Furthermore some *mujerista* theologians have argued that the space to make genuine choices is not only an appropriate but a necessary tool of liberation. In agreement with Gutierrez's notion that the poor must become "artisans of their own proper liberation" (1975, 52), Isasi-Díaz reveals the necessity of certain oppressed peoples harnessing agency and therefore taking steps to determine their own liberation and to become "agents of our own history" (Isasi-Díaz, 2004b, 54). Just as a reclamation of all of our embodied locations was noted in the Introduction in relation to exposing the subjectivity and positionality of all theorising, it emerges here as also essential to liberation. Marta Benavides offers further explanation of the significance of this to the lives of Latina woman, writing that "All that we have left is ourselves and the future we forge. Our inheritance, above everything else, is our will to survive as self-determining people" (1988, 139).[88] Engaging with a different context, but detecting a similar emphasis on self-determination, Fran Porter notes that for women and others who experienced the conflicts in Northern Ireland, "empowerment is experienced by individuals or groups as they assume responsibility for themselves" and "become active agents in their situation" (2013, 94). For a people whose historic remembrances, present realities, and future hopes have been co-opted by oppressive forces, then, the importance of re-centring their own lives and experiences, and determining their own liberation, becomes essential to survival and to envisioning a future that honours and empowers those lives and those experiences.[89] Furthermore, this emphasis on self-determination is of wider importance, particularly in light of the earlier critiques of

[88] Survival is an important element of this, and is thoroughly explored in Chapter Four.

[89] This is not to say that these perspectives are either atheistic or egotistical; rather, the emphasis here is on exercising moral agency (Isasi-Díaz, 2004b, 61) in solidarity with the oppressed (Isasi-Díaz, 2004b, 58), empowered by the God who "calls women to work unceasingly for justice" (Moody, 1996, 68). There is an emphasis here, then, on God empowering these moves towards self-determination.

eschatology which noted the denial of female bodies and the encouragement of self-denial in women.[90]

Delores Williams provides a similar perspective in her reading of Hagar, wherein she interprets Hagar's experience as a "self-initiated liberation event", coupled with a "radical encounter with God" (1993, 26). Williams sees in Hagar a woman who resisted and protested against oppressive forces by being agential in crafting and shaping her own liberation. This should not be read as being purely individualistic, though; Hagar's concern was not only for herself but also for her son.[91] Moreover, the enduring impact of such stories is doubtless, for as Clark writes: "[Hagar's] life story of single motherhood, slavery, poverty, hardship, abuse, and survival provides a compelling parallel to black women's experiences in the United States" (2012, 48). Indeed, Williams notes that Hagar's story subsequently "empowers the female slave of African descent to hope and act" (1993, 26). Thus, being agential in one's own liberation can here be seen as also having both communal and generational impacts. These readings reveal that, for some women, the space and ability to be self-determining people is crucial to their own liberation, and to the liberation of others they are connected with. As such, any model of the eschatological process must make space for this. However, whilst liberation can take the form of self-determination and self-initiation, it need not follow that self-determination is the sole defining feature of liberation. Indeed, this brings problems for other oppressed people who do not have the capacity to be agential in this manner, as noted. Other framings of freedom, then, should be held as equally constitutive of freedom, in order to truly and fully value different experiences of the meaning of freedom.

[90] This also adds that the praxis of eschatology must be one which supports the development of self-possession; thus Chapter Four will explore the role that self-love can play in living an embodied eschaton.

[91] Genesis 21.14-19, for instance, tells how Hagar wept for her son when "the water in the skin was gone" and how God opened Hagar's eyes to a well of water, to which she "went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink".

The eschatological process can thus be thought to consist of God making space for those who are willing and able to choose to accept or refuse God. Moltmann speaks of the relational "wide space" of God (1996, 336), and I argue that such wide space, if truly relational, must honour the choices of created beings. This is a space wide enough both for creation to be effective and for God to be affected, both for good and for ill. It is thus appropriate to claim that God's love is precarious, and that God remains open to suffering as creation suffers and causes suffering. Such instances, we may claim, grieve the heart of God (Genesis 6.6). Vanstone takes this a step further and notes that such precariousness is actually integral to love. He writes that "Where the object of love is truly an 'other', the activity of love is always precarious" on account of the distance between loves, the possibility of misjudgement or rejection, or a response that is disproportionate to the love offered. It is for this reason that Vanstone claims love is both poignant and potentially tragic (1977, 46). Thus, the wide space that God's embrace creates allows creation to make genuine choices, even if such choices cause the suffering of other members of creation and of Godself.

However, whilst there must be space for creation to express genuine agency in this way, there must also be space for these choices not to hinder God's ultimate love for and loyalty to relational presence with all members of creation. Again, this cannot be achieved through dominance but through loving relationality. This is truly a mark of freedom as it draws creation into an existence where nothing can obstruct loving relationships amongst creation and between creation and God; not even creation itself is able to hinder this. Indeed Romans 8.38-39 asserts that:

> neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What this means, according to Moltmann, is "not just that the murderers will finally fail to triumph over their victims, but that they cannot in eternity even remain the murderers of their victims" (Moltmann, 1996, 255). This is not an eschatological *discounting* of the choice of the individual, as both God and creation suffer as a consequence of such choices, but rather an eschatological *transformation* of such choices. This means that choices are honoured and genuinely affect the process. When these choices run contrary to the experience of loving relationality, it is legitimate to claim that they hurt both God and creation, both now and in the future. Still, given God's loyalty to all of creation in relationship, God's love cannot ultimately be thwarted by such choices. It can be lastingly affected insomuch as its particular expressions and manifestations perceive and respond to creaturely choices, but its flow cannot be stemmed by such choices. In drawing all into God's embrace in the eschatological future, then, God tears down all oppressive dichotomies which would separate individuals or communities into "saved" and "damned", and reveals a love that enables *all* to become members of the web of loving relationality through the loving transformation of that which hinders such relationality.[92]

However, Hans Reinders notes that even such a universal perception of God's love appears to be insufficient in the face of those with profound disabilities. Reinders engages specifically with David Pailin's work on the unconditionality of God's love, thus it is helpful to first expound this before we examine Reinders's critique. Pailin critiques the contributory notion of value or "norm of worth" in light of the experiences of "severely handicapped people" (1992, 96). He goes on to present a number of reasons as to why it is both unethical and unloving to apportion worth on the basis of an individual's contributory abilities (1992, 95-108) and thus concludes that worth is not to be established by contribution. Rather, he claims, "[all] are of ultimate worth

[92] This reference to transformation will be continued in the following chapter with reference to embodied continuity and discontinuity in the content of the eschaton.

because they are embraced within and cherished by the divine" (1992, 120). Thus, Pailin's starting point for demarcating worth is the embrace of the divine, and I have similarly proposed a universal and indeed eschatological divine embrace that is not predicated on choice or agency.

However, Reinders raises a critique to Pailin that could similarly be levelled against my proposals. Whilst appreciating the moves to present God as one who does not apportion concern or care on the basis of creaturely response (as argued by Pailin, 1992, 113, and myself earlier in this chapter), Reinders posits that such accounts fail to clarify the teleological existence of the profoundly disabled (2008, 223). In short, Reinders's point, when applied to my own constructions, is that including all of creation in the eschaton whilst similarly claiming that God and the eschaton are affected by creation maintains a hierarchy of worth. In such a model, according to Reinders, all are included but some experience this inclusion in more effective and transformative ways than others. As Reinders writes, "It certainly seems that that account marginalizes the profoundly disabled to the point of irrelevance" (2008, 223). This is, of course, not my intention, and the emphasis I have placed on experiences over actions enables a response to Reinders's concerns. By claiming that it is our many and varied experiences that are the primary factor in affecting both God and the future, I affirm the existences of both those who can make choices and act in agential manners, and those who do not or cannot. The capacities to choose and to act are simply some aspects of some people's existences; they affect God, but no more so than any other experiences. Furthermore, the wide space of God that makes space for choice can also be thought of as "the interval that protects the otherness of the Other" (Rivera, 2007, 130). This means that there is also equal space to honour the experiences of those who cannot choose. Nevertheless, choice is given attention here because it has been and indeed still is an important aspect of some people's existences, and one that, as we have seen, has

been used to challenge notions of a universal future. I thus hold together an appreciation of this with a conviction that choice is not the only measure of freedom or of inclusion in the eschatological future, nor is it the only factor that affects our relationships with God.

I have touched upon the experiences of those whose relationship to choice is either non-existent or undesired, and the latter element signifies a dimension to the hindrance of relationality that must be considered. Just as the active refusal of God prevents one from experiencing God and therefore experiencing true freedom, so too can the familiarity with one's own situation hinder one's perception of the meaning of and need for freedom. Thus, the embrace of all in the eschatological future cannot only be a process of God transforming the choice to refuse God, but must also include God transforming apathy. This is crucial for creation, and for women in particular, as women have often been taught that such apathy or passivity is an appropriate response to suffering or injustice (Grey, 2000, 33). Moltmann expounds this claim and, knowing more than most the effect that a curtailing of freedom can have on one's desire for freedom, he explains that if we never believe in an alternative to present pains then these pains become chains with which we familiarise and acquiesce. However, he writes, "*When freedom is close, the chains begin to hurt*" (1992, 75). By God drawing near to creation through embodied relational presence, then, creation is presented with an alternative, both presently and in the future, to their current pains and is enabled to experience true freedom. As such, the precariousness of love that was noted above *must* be balanced with the *promise* of love, for we know that "the *Exodus* leads to the *covenant*" (Moltmann, 1992, 113; cf. Russell, 1974, 60). This means that God is endlessly committed to perceiving and responding to that which binds us into the desire for non-relationality, and transforming these chains through relentlessly offering relational love to all of creation.

This cannot simply be an *offer* of relationality though, for there would always remain the possibility of refusal. Having claimed that choice, when manifest as the refusal of relationships, is not to be upheld as an accurate or appropriate measure of freedom, I can thus argue that God not only offers relationality but actively helps all to experience it. This does not thwart freedom but, in fact, actuates full freedom, for refusals are not discounted but instead are met with even more abundant loving relationality which relentlessly reveals and draws us to the freedom of relationality against the chains of refusal. In light of all of these explorations, then, Keller's critique can be challenged, as the final act of redemption simply *cannot* be one of dominance. God is not domineering but is rather the loving God who liberates *from* forms of dominance. The process and goal of the eschatological future, then, is God's relational love: dominance does not obtain.

Still, there may be circumstances where the rejection of relationship with God is not a product or action of hurtful intent or apathetic passivity. It may be the case that individuals simply do not desire to be in relationship with God, the reasons for which may be multitudinous. If God is truly to honour relationships with creation then it may seem feasible to claim that God must also honour the desire to absent oneself from or never even enter into such relationships. Simply claiming that this would hurt God and hinder God's freedom is not reason enough to claim that creation must therefore be drawn into relationship. Members of creation who have no desire for God would seemingly also have no concern for experiencing relational freedom with God. However, the emphasis I have placed on the distinctly communitarian nature of freedom can help with responding to this, for the eschatological process is not achieved for or by God in isolation. Indeed, it has been highlighted that true freedom cannot pertain to autonomy and isolation. Those who desire this alone can be said to be self-

enclosed; that is, severed from true freedom which is relationality, even if only with other members of creation. Moltmann infers that turning away from such relationality is in itself turning away from God; it is "being imprisoned in one's own existing being, and closed against the future" (1993, 210). Thus the lack of desire for relationship with God, who is in essence loving relationality, is essentially the lack of desire for the full experience of relationality with all of creation. This is not to say that when we seek relationships with other members of creation, then we automatically desire relationship with God, whether we are aware of this or not. Instead, the interconnected nature of relationships means that relationships amongst creation can never be fully experienced unless God too is included in such relating and, moreover, is accepted as the final help to realise such relating in full.

This may, conversely to my intentions, seem an insensitive proposal; there may be members of creation whom we do not, for legitimate reasons, wish to relate to for all of eternity. People who have severely hurt us or hurt those we love, for example. However, it is important to restate that I am not advocating an automatic and instantaneous inclusion of all into the eschatological future but rather a process wherein hurtful actions are processed and transformed in the fullness of God's love. Returning to the maternal metaphor can yet again offer clarity to this consideration. Often framed in terms of an expectation of women to "give the time to others", and accordingly not to themselves (Diprose, 2009, 150 and 153), time in the maternal metaphor can be rethought as both giving and having time to develop relationships. Heyward observes that a great deal of time is needed "for us to learn how to let go of our senses of separateness, isolation, and self-control" (1989, 100) and Anderson adds to this that loving relationships must be given the freedom of time (2012, 167). The gestational time needed to develop an embodied relationship with a child in its mother's womb can again reflect the processual time of the eschaton wherein

relationships are cultivated by an involved and intimate God, as opposed to being instantaneously brought into existence by an omnipotent God. This can mean that when relationships have been hindered by abuse or hurt, time is afforded for the reparation of those relationships; those hurts we have experienced, along with those who have hurt us and those who we have hurt, are afforded time to be transformed by and in loving relational presence with God.[93] Indeed, Moltmann claims that it is only through God lovingly, actively, and freely being with creation that creation can be brought out of such "closed-in-ness" (1993, 210). Accordingly, Moltmann claims that "freedom means the unhindered participation in the eternal life of the triune God himself [*sic.*], and in his [*sic.*] inexhaustible fullness and glory" (1993, 213).[94] This further honours the ways in which creation can help to create the process, for a relational God is seen to engage in and even require a process of transformation in order that relationships be characterised by love and not tainted by hurt.

A Free(ing) Process

Thus far it has been claimed that freedom cannot solely be defined by choice but, given God's loyalty to relationships with creation, the eschatological process must make space for it in order to honour the experiences of those for whom choice is important. *Full* freedom, however, has been defined as full relationality hence the claim that choices which hinder this will be transformed by the loving help of God. This has been understood to be offered and actualised by God out of loyalty to relationships with creation. If such relationality is a hallmark of freedom then we can perceive the meaning of the claim in Galatians 5.1 that "For freedom Christ has set us free". It is for

[93] The space of time has practical significance, to be sure, and this will be explored more thoroughly when I come to address the significance of touch particularly in the contexts of such abuses and hurts in Chapter Four. Furthermore, this highlights again how the pursuit of freedom in relationality is something we can experience and practise in the present.

[94] The particular character or content of this life will be constructed more fully in the next chapter wherein I negotiate the particularities of continuity and discontinuity of experiences of suffering (and those who have caused the suffering) in the eschatological future.

freedom that God created creation and God intends to partake in and assist both the present and final freeing of creation to experience full freedom. Russell articulates this by asserting that "God has created us and bids us become what God intends us to be" (1982a, 42). Thus, there is a sense in which creation is called to help create the relational process of actualising full freedom for all, even as creation remains dependent on God as the ultimate ground and goal of that freedom. This is not a greater calling for those who are able, on behalf of those who are not. Instead, it is an assertion that we are all called to be in, and to depend on others for, loving relationships of freedom in whatever form and to whatever degree is possible and appropriate for each individual in such relationships.

Such an understanding is rooted in both the interconnectedness of all members of creation to one another and to their Creator, and moreover in the inseparability of the freedom of one from the freedom of another, as was earlier claimed. Letty Russell expands on her claim that freedom is only fulfilled when it is experienced by all by asserting that "Our freedom does not consist of exercising our rights in competition with the rights of others. Rather, it consists of sharing the rights of others" (1982a, 94; cf. Jantzen, 2009, 144). In such an understanding, freedom is constructed as diametrically opposed to the earlier definitions whereby "exercising our rights in competition with the rights of others" was deemed to be the hallmark of a freedom that pertains to self-determining actions. Instead, freedom here means relationality and concern for another, not at the expense of one's own "rights" or choices, but for the purpose of enhancing the lives of *all* members of creation, both now and in the future. Indeed, it is the very recognition of the worth of the other and the movement towards a universal recognition of that worth that signifies God's loving intention for creation. This again means that inclusion in God's love and in the eschaton cannot be measured on our contribution. Accordingly, Pailin (1992, 149) claims that:

> Freedom means that individuals are to be respected as the persons that they are, not for their readiness and ability to satisfy the requirements of a Procrustean measure of allegedly authentic human being.

Our freedom, then, is enhanced by relationality and the recognition of the worth of each and every individual in relation. Accordingly, it is compromised by isolation and individualism; we are to be recognised as worthy individuals in relationship, not to strive after individualism at the expense of relationship. We remember, though, that this does not mean that the individual is lost: isolation thwarts the fullness of life and, accordingly, relationality draws all particular individuals into the fullest experience of themselves in relationship with other individuals.

This is not to say that individual freedom is impossible but rather that it is always communal, as was earlier argued. Bearing in mind this communal interconnectivity and relationality, it is legitimate to claim that freedom is only objectively and generally "true" when it is subjectively and individually true for all, as non-freedom in the life of one other impinges on the possibility of freedom in the life of all. This justifies an appeal to the eschatological future, because whilst human progression may be able to envision and create a future that actualises the freedom of many, its ability to actualise this for *all* is questionable. Moltmann concurs, and names the reliance on human ability alone the "progressive syndrome". He claims that those who subscribe to this view are limited in their vision of the future, and can only conceive of the future as "merely a prolongation of the present" (1999a, 276; cf. Bauckham, 1999a, 160). Whilst not hope*less*, there is something *more* hopeful that we can grasp at here: the emphasis can again be on God *both* joining with creation in their striving to actuate freedom *and* ultimately helping creation to achieve that freedom. This "joining with" creation has the ability to communicate a sense of creation having a certain responsibility to help God realise the future in the present, in active response to God's loyalty to helping creation.

This is further explained by Grace Jantzen. Whilst Jantzen would most probably not support a reading of her work through the lens of an eschatological future, it is possible to use her work in such a manner in order to claim that God's role in the eschatological process does not thwart freedom but actually helps creation to experience full freedom. Continuing the reading of God's power as directed by God's love, Jantzen writes that "God's power is his [*sic.*] power to give independence, autonomy, even to creatures over whom, strictly speaking, he [*sic.*] is sovereign" (Jantzen, 1984a, 152). Although I have disagreed with the reading of freedom solely in terms of autonomy, it is possible to see here that God's loving help draws creation to the full experience of freedom as opposed to compromising it. Jantzen explains this at length by claiming that God does not "compel or manipulate but invites response" (1984a, 153). It is because God is love that God cannot coerce or even persuade. Instead, God opens Godself to the response of creation; just as God is responsive to creation, God is also responsive to creation's response. Yet, Jantzen (1984a, 153) continues in the vein of which I have argued, asserting that God is also more than this. She writes:

> This would be a very misleading half of the truth if the other half were not also remembered: that, as creator and sustainer, no creature exists or has autonomy except from him: God is All, Being Itself. One-sided emphasis on human autonomy impoverishes our appreciation of God's sovereignty. Yet one-sided emphasis on his sovereignty can easily hide from us the extent of his self-giving love, in whom we, finite and dependent and yet autonomous, live and move and have our being.

Along these lines we can claim that freedom is created by God, thus its eschatological fulfilment is not contrary to our freedom but rather signifies its fulfilment. That this is dictated and balanced by God's loving loyalty to being present in the experiences of creation and actively feeling and responding to these experiences means that the help to finally experience full freedom is not an act of divine dominance but rather the most wholehearted and profound experience of divine loving relationality, which is true, authentic, fulfilled freedom.

If the final and full experience of relationality in the eschaton can be understood to be indicative of authentic and full freedom, we are again drawn to specify the process by which this is achieved. In considering the role that God may play in achieving this, we can again return to considering the experience of God in relation to creation. Moltmann proposes God's experience of God drawing near to and dwelling with creation (Moltmann, 1981, 102), in such a way that the experience of being relationally present with God is not *reliant* on the cognisance or choice of creation. Rather, it is reliant on God's love and desire for relationship with all of creation in all of the particularities of their existences. Included in this are both the ways in which our experiences and our choices, when possible or employed, affect God for good and for ill. All are lasting and significant to the life of God and to all life in the eschaton, but they do not compromise God's love for creation. Maintaining a sense of God being both in and more than creation is integral here, as God emerges as one who not only draws near to creation through indwelling with creation, but also as one who is able to draw creation to dwell in Godself (cf. Moltmann, 1981, 211-212). God thus has the intent and power to make all free, but far from this being an exercise in dominance, it can be seen as a process through which God will also arrive at God's freedom. This means that freedom is not something that God possesses and imposes onto creation, but rather it is something that can *only* be achieved, for creation and for God, through relationality.

Russell calls this a "gift" (1979a, 175), but again this should not be used to infer that freedom is something that God already possesses in full. Indeed, if freedom is understood as loving relationality and divine power is framed accordingly, then this is not something to be owned but rather developed as it is shared. We remember Brock's reading of the story of the haemorrhaging woman in Mark 5.27-34, wherein she highlighted the mutual sharing and co-creating of power between Jesus and the woman

(Brock, 1995, 52). We may, then, agree with Suchocki who uses the language of gift to counter claims that God possesses full freedom and actualises it in a hierarchical manner. She contends that "Insofar as freedom is a gift, it is mutually accorded on the basis of personhood, not hierarchy" (1976, 156). Thus, God is able to draw creation to receiving the gift of freedom out of love for creation, even if it is only in the full drawing of all of creation that the gift becomes a full reality for both God and creation. The process cannot, however, be entirely mutual, as God remains able to help creation and thus holds a greater level of power. By reframing this power in terms of relational presence which is, importantly, *shared* with creation, and the actuation of freedom accordingly, this lack of mutuality does not signify dominance nor does it mean that freedom is accorded on the basis of hierarchy. Rather it signifies God's ability to fulfil God's love for and loyalty to creation by the full sharing of both power and freedom in relationships. That power has been so reframed means that God's ability to be *more* powerful does not mean that God remains domineering, but rather that God is most relational of all beings (cf. Christ, 2003, 46) and most able to help creation by actively and universally sharing the power to be freed for and free in relationships. God can, in this way, be said to experience more freedom and more power than creation, but in such a way that God is most able to help creation to share in the experience of relational freedom and power.

It is important to restate that God's love for creation, whilst universally helping all to experience full relationality, does so on a personal and individual basis. Still, the emphasis on relationality being experienced in full (that is, without the hindrances of rejection or suffering) may appear to imply a lack of difference in order that such harmony be possible. Indeed, if God wishes to draw all into freedom, which is loving relationality, one may question whether this necessitates the abolition of difference in order to avoid conflict. The need to avoid any such homogenising universal models is a

concern for many feminist theologians. Jantzen (2009, 39-40), for example, observes that:

> Philosophers can generate universals in abstraction, but insofar as we hope to understand the world and the society which we inhabit, let alone offer constructive interventions, we cannot dispense with actual life stories and their intersections.

The contention here is that universal categories and structures all too easily discount the lives of individuals for the purpose of serving a unifying agenda. This was seen in the Introduction with reference to the assumed gender neutrality within gender theory and theology, and emerges here as a concern also. A universal view of the future, then, potentially harbours dangers as the unifying agenda could quite easily be that of the powerful and dominant members of society. Indeed, Russell observes that "Differences are [usually] overcome by adopting a consensus that excludes those with different theology, lifestyle, culture, race or nationality" (1982b, 303). If such an agenda is the intention of God, then not only is God's very nature called into question, but also justification is potentially provided for similar agendas within creation. However, just as God's final eschatological act cannot be one of domination as God is not domineering but is rather loving and relational, so too can this final act not be one of homogenisation as this too is an act of dominance. Furthermore, homogeneity cannot feasibly be what a loving and relational God desires. The abolition of difference again seems more akin to a model of colonialism and dominance than to a model of love.

The freedom that God's love draws creation universally to, then, must affirm difference and diversity. Russell articulates this universality in terms of "unity without uniformity" (2009, 65) and observes that "It seems that God's intention is to 'remove all the bars' and create *a world full of riotous difference*" (2009, 55; cf. Bauckham, 1999b, 15; Soskice, 2007, 186).[95] Claiming that all will be included in the eschatological future

[95] Quite fittingly, this openness can be framed as the ever-changing and ever-expanding body of God. Vanier (1988, 103), for instance, sees the communal nature of the body of God as:

need not obliterate diversity, then, but rather can signify the drawing together of all diverse members of creation together in such a way that the particularities of individual lives and identities are retained and, even more, celebrated. This is an appropriate and beneficial model for the future as it is rooted in God drawing near to and dwelling with creation in all of its particularities. The ultimate purpose of this drawing near is to draw all into a future which embraces these particularities; that is, both makes space for them and helps them to flourish. Just as God's responsive presence was deemed to be directed by and to particular experiences then, the future is also imaged accordingly.[96] This helps us to experience such freedom now as it encourages us to create spaces that embrace different others, in all of their particularity, and so help cultivate their, and our own, flourishing.

Creating Freedom[97]

The reading of freedom that I have proposed has been focussed primarily on the eschatological process and the ways in which such freedom is compatible with a God who ultimately uses loving power to actualise loyalty to all of creation so as to draw all into future life. I have claimed that this is also experienceable in the present as God holds this future open to our influence; that is, our actions and experiences, whether they confirm or contradict the full experience of relational freedom, affect God and the future. I have also inferred that this can encourage us to create experiences of

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a living, dynamic body,
it is in continual movement.
It evolves as people grow,
As the whole body grows in welcoming new people.

This can help us to consider the universal embrace of God in the eschatological future as being one which cultivates a community that is dynamically and vibrantly embodied. This indicates yet more support for considering the content of the eschaton as being characterised by fluid and changing embodiments, as the next chapter argues.

[96] This is a claim that will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter wherein I speak more specifically about the nature of eschatological bodies and God's eschatological intentions for particular bodies.

[97] Some specific ways in which we can create and shape both the future and the experience of the future in the present will be the focus of the final chapter. The focus here is on how a God who helps the process to its completion can encourage us to similarly help to create the increasing freedom of all of creation.

relational freedom, and it is now important to develop this inference, for it may still be claimed that creation could legitimately do nothing and still the future would be realised on account of God's love and loyalty. Hart (1999, 69) appears to concur, explaining that:

> if the eventual outcome is secure regardless of our striving or lack of it towards the goal of our hope, if redemption does not rest on our fashioning of the conditions for the coming kingdom, then surely the more economic and comfortable option is to sit back and wait for it all to happen.

In short, if we cannot affect the future then we would be foolish to waste our energy trying. Such perceptions of the eschatological future signify the promotion of apathy about the present, and a reliance on the future to resolve all the injustices of both the past and present. However, Vanstone claims that "The creation is 'safe' not because it moves by programme towards a predetermined goal but because the same loving creativity is ever exercised upon it" (1977, 63). This can be read alongside Grey's claim which was noted in the previous chapter, that "God is always offering redemptive possibilities to the world" (1989, 35). It was there noted that these possibilities can only be realised by creation's active response to God's offer or God's "loving creativity", thus again signifying God's dependence on creation: if creation fails to respond, the possibilities for redemption remain only possibilities (Grey, 1989, 35). Thus whilst it is true to assert that I have claimed creation is "safe" on account of God's loving loyalty to creation, this does not mean that creation can sit idly by. To do so would, in fact, be a mark of non-freedom, for passivity and inaction have been deemed to be averse to relational presence and, accordingly, to freedom. Furthermore, such idleness would be of no benefit or sustenance, to ourselves or to others, as it would hinder our well-being and the development of who we are in relationships with others.

An eschatology of embodied relationships, wherein God helps all to experience full freedom, can encourage us to enter into relationships with others in order to help them to become free. May offers a similar perspective whereby she proposes a doxological

reading of presence which signifies God's eternal faithfulness to creation (1995, 69). She goes on to claim that this speaks to creaturely life as it signifies that those in positions of privilege have a responsibility to divest the power of privilege "in order to participate in the revelatory presence" (1995, 74) which, as she earlier writes, is concerned with "being alive in a way that makes others alive" (1995, 71). Thus, for May as for me, divine relational presence calls creation to respond by being responsible for the freedom of others and of oneself both in and for relationship. Participation in such relationships need not only refer to the active offer of relationships but can also pertain to an open welcome to the offer of relationships, which is in itself, we remember, active.[98] In addition to this, we recall that depending on others in relationships is also affirmed. These are authentic practices of both power and freedom for they live the conviction that the two are increased, not diminished, as they are shared in relationality.

Although we are called, in this way, to help create freedom, we also remember that the actions of creation cannot be the sole determining factors of our hope for the future. McCulloch rightly notes that such a perspective invests all hope in human beings (2002, 172) as creation are depicted as *equally* co-creators of the future. This serves, McCulloch claims to elevate "human beings to a 'God-like' status" (McCulloch, 2002, 80), and, I add, to relegate God to a "human-like" status. An eschatological perspective is, again, crucial here lest the weight of responsibility for creating a free future fall solely on humanity. Indeed, much earlier in this chapter we saw Raphael's observation that relationships can often be too heavy a load to bear for those in situations of extreme suffering. It is Raphael's observation that is of particular import for this

[98] We also remember the earlier-noted perspectives that attended to some experiences of disability in order to praise vulnerability in relationships. Whilst, we recall, disability was not unequivocally paralleled with vulnerability, the point was made that when disability *is* associated with vulnerability, this should not be devalued but rather framed as the essence of relationality. Here, then, we see that we can help to create freedom both by offering and accepting relationships which draw us into experiences of freedom.

section, as the *amount* of responsibility placed on humanity in this conception is inordinate, even impossible, particularly when one considers the experiences and lives of those who struggle daily to survive. This is not to juxtapose struggles for survival with redemption; indeed, struggles and protests against oppression can be seen to be significant in helping to create the eschatological process. I earlier observed Isasi-Díaz's claim that "the struggle is life" (1988, 99) and, far from this being a resignation to the struggle, it locates the quest for liberation firmly in the present.[99] Still, my point here is that removing any notion of God being able to help in this process and placing all hope in the actions of humanity is ultimately hopeless for those who are already burdened by their oppressions. It discounts the particularities and extremities of some sufferings, and whilst the location of redemption solely in humanity can certainly compel us to empathise and share in suffering we cannot, on our own, effect final and full experiences of life where suffering does not obtain.

There are yet more problems with relying so heavily on creation's actions to actuate the eschaton. This chapter has also observed critiques of the reliance on human ability from Moltmann, who challenged the "progressive syndrome" and the Western emphasis on progress and development (1999a, 276). The location of responsibility solely in humanity certainly presents an elitist and Western understanding of progress wherein humanity alone is deemed capable of creating a hopeful future. Brunner claims that this pertains to "belief in progress as hope resting upon self-confidence" which, he claims, "is the opposite of Christian hope, which is hope founded upon trust in God" (Brunner, 1954, 10). Recalling McCulloch's observation is beneficial here, as he notes:

> The idea that we are *co-creators* with God is designed to undercut the biblical theme of divine sovereignty over creation, yet ironically this elevates human beings to a 'God-like' status (2002, 80).

[99] Such notions will be addressed in more depth in Chapter Four.

In such a perspective, the future is potentially conceived of as a mere product of human progression. Whilst this progression may be informed by the redemptive possibilities that God offers to the world (Grey, 1989, 35) it is ultimately humanity's responsibility to realise this redemption, as Christ claims: "the responsibility for ending humanly created suffering [is placed] squarely in human hands" (2003, 175). The inference here is that suffering is a human creation therefore its remedy must also be a human creation. However, God again emerges here as distant and aloof, just as in the concepts of God as omnipotent. Thus, whilst it is important, in my understanding of realising the eschatological process, to affirm the actions of some members of creation, reliance on such actions cannot be total; that is, the realisation of the eschatological process cannot be reducible to human action. Whilst it is a significant part of it and shapes the process, the weight of responsibility should not be so much that it becomes central, unbearable or egotistical. Instead, the actions of creation must, as I have consistently argued throughout this chapter, be balanced with God's ability to help. This offers both humility and hope as it highlights that we cannot actualise the eschatological process alone but also that this inability is not the sum of the end to which the process moves. Those whose existences include the ability to act, have agency, and make choices are called to engage these abilities in ethical ways. This means helping others and, indeed, oneself to experience relational freedom in the hope that God does and will actuate the future of full relationality, and thus full freedom, for all.

Still, given the ways in which God is authentically affected by and responsive to our actions we can claim that the future remains open. What this means is that God can still be surprised by the particular content of the future. Such a perspective actually, and perhaps itself surprisingly, finds correlation with elements of process thought. Christ (2011a), for instance, writes that:

> I like to think that the world we know has been co-created through the billions of years of the evolutionary process and that even Goddess has been surprised and delighted by the particular ways life has evolved on this planet.

Having here claimed that God honours creaturely life by being both involved in the eschatological process and helping it to its completion, it is legitimate to claim that the eschatological process can be understood as being both known and unknown. That is, God can know that all will be drawn into it, on account of God's loyalty, but does not know the particular experiences contained therein and, accordingly, the particular responses needed. Again, this emphasises the simultaneous universality and particularity of the eschaton, insomuch as God can be said to know the universal scope of the future whilst only partially knowing the specific content of that future. As Letty Russell writes, the universal hope for all of humanity "is at the same time the concrete, situation-variable proclamation" of liberation (1979b, 23). Thus, we can claim that God has created us to be developing and becoming beings therefore can be surprised (and frustrated) by us; this emphasises God's love as *relationally responsive* in relation to our ever-changing selves. This love has been articulated alongside an emphasis on God's loyalty in order to propose that creation's refusals of relational presence, whilst certainly affecting the experience of relational freedom, do not ultimately hinder its realisation. Rather, this love makes space for the transformation of choice and even for the absence of choice in such a way that is loyal to the particularities of creaturely experiences and committed to the full experience of loving relationality with all in the freedom of the eschatological future.

## Conclusion

This chapter has responded to feminist theological critiques of an omnipotent God and their reconstructions of God as relationally involved with creation. I have argued that a God whose power is reframed as relational presence with and response to creation is also a God whose loving power helps all to experience this relationality. I have claimed

that, far from thwarting creaturely freedom, this actually draws all of creation into the full experience of freedom which is loving relationality with God and with all members of creation. This was seen to be underpinned by a God who is simultaneously immanent and transcendent; that is, intimately involved with creation and committed and able to help all of creation experience this intimacy. The eschatological process has, on this basis, been reconstructed as one that creation authentically affects as creation affects God in relationship. This pertained not only to God feeling with and responding to creation but also to the particular nature of the process and creation's actions in helping to create this process. By emphasising God's final help, though, I countered claims that creaturely choice is to be made definitive of freedom and instead argued that the fullest experience of freedom is relationality. True freedom was seen to be characterised by God's final loving help to enable all to experience this relationality. Furthermore, this freedom was seen to be beneficial in the present as it enables us to cultivate and experience greater levels of flourishing, and draws us into more full experiences of ourselves in relationships with others.

Within this, choices were honoured for those with the capacity to make choices, even if this amounted to the choice to refuse relationship with God. Such refusals were understood to hurt God, but not to thwart God's commitment to loving relationality with all of creation. The diverse nature of such refusals was seen to affect both God and the eschaton in terms of the particular nature of God's tangible response and the active embrace of the time and space needed to actuate eschatological existence. This space was also deemed to be wide enough to authentically embrace and relate to those who do not have the ability to make decisions. Again, this contributed to my critique of the centrality of choice and my emphasis instead on relationality as the hallmark of freedom. Furthermore, the exercising of choices, and particularly the choices of those who would reject God, were understood to be met with God's relentless love which is

unceasing in its revelation of and help to experience full freedom in relationality. The space of time in which these loving relationships are cultivated was understood to honour creation's actions and experiences, as such existences were not said to be instantaneous. This was also seen to honour God's loyalty to the process by bringing it to fruition in a loving, relational manner.

This suggests that grasping at specificity for the future is possible on account of the legitimacy of the hope in both God and therefore the future also. Moreover, the partial knowledge of God that was spoken of a moment ago enables us to grasp at specificity, for the future is rooted in our existences and experiences in relation to one another and to God. As we experience our bodies and the bodies of others in relationships, we share the partial knowledge of the eschaton that God too experiences. Having here emphasised the embodied and tangible nature of God's relational presence and response I am able, in the next chapter, to construct a future that affirms the reclamation of embodiments and earthiness and, even more so, allows them to flourish in the abundance for which they are intended. In so doing I will seek to contradict the aspects of life which *should not* find a place in the future: aspects that are both damaging and inappropriate to a life characterised by love and liberation. More importantly, though, I will construct an image of newness and creativity whereby the specific nature of redeemed life is grasped at, to as great a degree as is possible. Such newness is rooted in both the experiences of creation and the intentions of God. This means that whilst we cannot know the full nature of the future for which we hope, by hoping in a God who so affirms relationships with embodied beings, we can see our embodiments as being capable of uncovering something revelatory concerning the nature of the eschatological future.

## 3. A Changing Content

### Introduction

This chapter responds to feminist theological critiques surrounding the content of eschatology, and also emerges out of the previous chapter's reconstructions of the eschatological process. There must, in short, be congruence between the process and the content (or the means and the end) for, as was earlier argued, the end cannot justify the means. Thinkers such as Jantzen (1984b, 39), Baker-Fletcher (2006, 83), and Keller (2003b, 422), raised the contention that no eschaton could be loving if it ultimately compromised the freedom and integrity of creation. Having reconstructed the process, or the means, as being capable not only of affirming but also of bringing creaturely freedom to its fullest experience, it is appropriate now to reconstruct the content (or end) in a coherent manner, in order to prevent these thinkers' charges from being defensible. This chapter, then, will contend that a God who relates to creation in an embodied and tangible manner, and honours those relationships in the ways I have claimed, signifies a God who takes relationships with creation seriously. This must mean that God takes our bodies seriously for as Berry proposes, "We are not who we are without our bodies" (1982, 953). An eschatology that is realised by divine-creation relations which are necessarily embodied, then, must likewise be an eschaton that is *characterised* by such.[100] Moreover, it was argued in the previous chapter that divine-creation relations are conducted on a personal level, with God attending to the particularities of creaturely life. This grounds the ensuing discussion as I seek to negotiate how such embodied particularity is affirmed in the eschaton. Informed by Bacon's observation that "All embodiments are particular" (2009, 234), I claim that

[100] Authenticity in such relations cannot, though, simply pertain to affirming embodied life as unequivocally "good", for as Berry posits, "both the dark and the bright sides of our embodied existence must be attended to if we are to regard our finitude as theologically relevant" (1982, 953). A God who takes relations with embodied creation seriously, that is, so seriously that they are instrumental in the process and integral in the content of the eschaton, must perceive and respond to both edifying and oppressive experiences of embodiment. Accordingly, this chapter will similarly attend to both.

focussing on framings and experiences of *women's bodies* here is both legitimate and necessary, for a God who takes *particular bodies* seriously must also take seriously the fact that women's bodies have been and are oppressed precisely because of that particularity. Relevant to this discussion is the observation, noted in Chapter One, that women's bodies have been excluded from the eschaton on account of their association with change and death. I will reconfigure these associations and so challenge this exclusion by constructing a model of dynamic and fluid eschatological embodiment.[101]

## The Affirmation of Bodies

### Grounding the Construction

The affirmation of qualities associated with female bodies, and some women's experiences of these qualities, coupled with God's love for and loyalty to them forms the basis of an eschatological model of affirmation (what will endure in the eschaton), contradiction (what will not endure), and construction.[102] Jürgen Moltmann similarly utilises an eschatological model of affirmation and contradiction; however he places more confidence in the power of contradiction than in affirmation. This is understandable as contradictions benefit from a substantial experiential grounding that is potentially lacking in affirmations. Moltmann (1997, 123-124) subscribes to this notion, arguing that the futurist images we conceive of:

> are all strong in their denial of the negative from which we suffer [...] But they are feeble in their picture of the positive side, because in this impaired life we can as yet have no experience of new creation.

According to Moltmann, then, we have an experiential epistemology that feeds our assertions of the negative; that which we suffer and desire to be freed from. When we

[101] This is not to say that the Christian tradition has had no sense of eschatological embodiment; Isherwood and Stuart note a semblance of bodily appreciation in the works of Tertullian and Augustine, for example (1998, 135). Still, there has been, as is well-documented, a devaluation of the female body which has been promoted in association with an emphasis on the incorporeality of the body in the eschaton.

[102] It should be noted that these categories are not compartmentalised but rather interact with and inform one another.

come to articulate the positive though, our speech is hindered by a poverty of experience and knowledge about this "new creation". However, the grounds of my affirmation suggest that we have access to concrete, albeit complex, information about the nature of the future. Embodied experiences can again be understood as prophetic. In particular, the alignment of female bodies with material fluidity is here reclaimed as something that speaks truthfully of all existences, both now and in their future lives. Such an affirmation can then feed contradictions, as an eschatology typified by dynamically changing embodiments contradicts anything that threatens the affirmation of bodies; namely, suffering, pain, and death.

These affirmations and contradictions, to be extrapolated over the course of this chapter, can enable a specific and novel construction of the content of the eschaton. Such constructions are crucial in order that the eschaton not be a mere perpetuation of the positive or negation of the negative. Jantzen makes a similar observation, claiming that speaking in the negative indicates a failure to move beyond the level of critiquing that which already exists. Subsequently, it hampers the possibility of articulating or imagining anything new (1998, 2-4). Similarly, though, if we confine our thinking to affirming whatever is identified as "positive" then we likewise restrict our ability to extend our imagining into considering the newness of the future. There must, then, be something novel about the eschaton lest it be indistinguishable from present lives and experiences and, therefore, be unnecessary. The emphasis on transformation in the latter part of this chapter speaks to this novelty as it signifies the future's simultaneous connection to and difference from present life. By attempting to construct a new model of the eschatological future on the basis of traits identified with female bodies, I again conduct a strategic engagement with essentialised understandings of female bodies. I also align myself with the methodologies of thinkers such as Jantzen and Isasi-Díaz, who see construction as a crucial aspect of feminist theology. Isasi-Díaz's claims

resurface as being particularly relevant to this chapter, as we recall her assertion that we need to "flesh out the shape of the kind of new heaven and the new earth for which justice-seeking people hunger and thirst" (1999, 229). My approach, then, in addition to contributing to the challenge to traditional constructions of the eschaton, will also contribute to feminist discourse by speaking with specificity about the eschatological future and doing so in a way that transforms the patriarchal devaluation of female bodies.

Female Bodies and Change

The association of female bodies with change has been used to justify the treatment of female bodies as suspect, troublesome, and fearful, as we have seen. Miller-McLemore even goes so far as to say that there has been a hatred of the "chaotic interconnections that women embody" (Miller-McLemore, 1994, 183). By claiming that such readings of female bodies can instead be transformed into a valuation of the fluidity of all existences, I challenge essentialised readings of female bodies and, similarly, the traditional alignment of static disembodiment with perfection. In light of Christ's observation that women have been devalued through their association with embodied changes (2003, 48), I re-read this association as a beneficial way to rethink the nature of all bodies and God's intention for those bodies in the future. Mount-Shoop proposes that such theologising has the ability to help us "out of a disembodied faith toward a re-membering of God's embodied hopes for us" (2010, 26). The reasons for emphasising the need for an eschatology that embraces embodied change lie in the importance of embodiment and the inseparability of embodiment from fluidity. As Keller writes, "The body is a self's ownmost place", not that it is lived in like a house, "but that *as body the self takes place*" (Keller, 1996a, 176). Existence apart from bodiliness is thus inconceivable. A *future* existence of enduring life that affirms bodies must accordingly and necessarily also affirm change, lest this new life be nothing like life at all. This has

particular resonance with feminist theology because, as has been illustrated throughout this thesis so far, women's bodies have suffered greatly under their association with materiality, fluidity, sensuality, and all that is contained therein.

Indeed, the temporal process has been understood to be writ large on women's bodies; wrinkling, expanding, shrinking, or even disbanding bodies mark not only the course of time but also the porousness of space. Female bodies have been burdened with the assumption that they alone tell the time and fill the space; they are feared for ostensibly exposing our existences as thoroughly temporal and material. As noted, such associations have been charged with claims of imperfection; patriarchal thought has presented the static and settled (male) "body" as the rightful inheritor of the "Kingdom of God". This is an inheritance that female bodies, characterised as changing and fluid, have been denied. Annalet van Schalkwyk offers a different reading, and refers to "the peace that we experience in our bodies as they change from young and beautiful to middle-aged or old and yet beautiful in new ways" (2002, 151). Of course, such changes have not been, and are often still not defined as "beautiful"; indeed, going through *the* change is often caricatured as being exemplary of female unpredictability and instability. As Moltmann-Wendel (1994, 27) writes:

> The body is the terrain on which [the process of aging] is played out, and particularly in the rich countries the aged body has become a spectre, contrasting with the ideals of these countries with their self-image of health and success.

Aging bodies, and specifically *female* aging bodies, are thus seen to be averse to the particularly western ideals of well-being, achievement, and, we may add, beauty.

If, on the other hand, we affirm the aging process, and other embodied processes, as being indicative of the vitality and creativity embedded in embodied life, we can not only reclaim the value and worth of women's complex experiences of embodiment, but

also affirm the changing nature of all life. As Nicola Slee (2004c, 90) writes in her poem, "This woman's body":

> This woman's body of mine
> which has always been growing and changing and shedding and
> ripening
> is forever gifting me with her wisdom

By grasping hold of the patriarchal assumption that women's bodies are particularly in touch with the material and temporal, and reclaiming this as a gift of wisdom, we can redefine embodied change as something to be celebrated and valued *in all of creation*. In so doing, we can reunite all bodies with a sense of ultimate worth. Moreover, we can consequently reframe the eschaton as a hopeful place full of dynamic bodies, as this chapter will shortly specify.[103]

Further to this, embodied changes can also be revalued by reading them as being indicative of a sense of empowerment. This is noticeable in Lucille Clifton's poem "Homage to My Hair" which affirms and celebrates aging, as the poet exclaims, "the grayer she do get, good God, the blacker she do be!" (cited by Kriner, 2005, 197). Speaking with similar poeticism about a woman and her hair, Griffin writes that its growth on the body signals that "Profusion is cherished. Profusion is unravelled. Each moment acquires identity" (1978, 210). In both of these examples, changing and aging bodies are experienced as a woman becoming more in touch with herself; her identity increasing as her body changes. Embodied change can, in this way, be understood as signifying a creative relationship with time (rather than time charting its course on the passive female body), and an increased sense of identity. This means that bodies and their changes, rather than signifying deterioration and death, can instead signify a creative newness that constantly becomes more than it once was without what it once was being less than it now is. This also has implications for identity, as "who we are"

[103] This can also encourage us to pursue practices that bring ourselves more in touch with our embodiments, as both a sign and a creation of such an eschaton. The ways in which we may do this shall be the focus of the next chapter.

becomes more complete, not by leaving behind previous experiences but by embracing them in an ever-expanding newness of bodiliness.[104] Bodies can, in this way, be said to be both in touch with and touched by their relationships with time and space, and with other bodies in time and space. An eschaton characterised by an open embrace of bodies that so feel and change can reclaim embodied change by affirming it as being indicative of fulfilled life. Bodies are no longer in dualistic relationships with their spiritualised "self", then, but rather are the very location of the self's creative and complex identity.[105]

Affirming these various and complex embodied changes can find confirmation in certain readings of Jesus' embodiment. Bacon (2009, 245), for example, notes that Jesus' embodiment was far from static or stable. She writes that:

> Jesus' body is indeed a site of contestation: It is a male body but also a transgendered body (on account of the inclusivity of the body of Christ), a temporal, suffering body but also a timeless, resurrected, glorified body; a divine body but also a human body. His body thus cannot reflect a stable image of oneness back at itself.

Challenging the association of stasis and stability with perfection, and even with divinity, this praises the complexity of bodies and finds worth in their uncontrollability and indefinability. Indeed, Bacon claims that this suggests that "particularity itself [...] is affirmed by the Incarnation" and therefore that "female bodies in all their difference and diversity might be affirmed on the grounds of their own particularity" (2009, 234-235). Thus the divine embrace that was spoken of in Chapter Two is wide enough to provide space not only for individuals to make genuine decisions and so effect change, but also for them to hold on to their particular identities and so embrace the embodied changes that comprise these identities. The particular elements of embodied change

[104] This notion of bodies becoming more than they presently are is developed later in this chapter.

[105] This calls us back to claims made in Chapter Two, wherein freedom was understood to pertain to becoming fully "who we are" through embracing open and vulnerable relationality. Bodies are similarly valued as integral here, for it is through being in touch with our bodies and the bodies of others that we become who we truly are.

affirmed above, whilst not conclusive of all experiences of embodied change, can be affirmed in their particularity and can foster a sense that various embodied changes can be celebrated and valued. They can also convey something of God's actions and intentions, as God relates to such changing beings in all of their particularity, and helps us to a future where such particularity not only endures but abounds. Propelled by such affirmations of embodied changes, then, I propose that an eschatological future which truly honours and embraces dynamic embodiments must also effect the contradiction of death.

## The Contradiction of Death

### Grounding the Contradiction

An eschatology which contradicts death can be constructed firstly by attending to past and present experiences of oppression, suffering, and death. In taking seriously the sufferings of those who have gone before us and those we encounter now we can specify the subject of contradiction and enact the contradiction, informed by and in anticipation of the affirmation. Such a task is appreciated by Thiel, who claims that "A meaningful eschatology [...] is one in which knowledge of the future emerges from the existential circumstances of the believer's life now" (2006, 520). An ethic of attentiveness to lived experiences ensures that any constructions of the future are informed by considerations of past and present experiences. Quite appropriately, this sense of attentiveness has resonance with the sense of being "really present", to recall the earlier point made by Carter Heyward (1989, 132). Being "really present" was seen to be a hallmark of relational presence, thus attentiveness to lived experiences emerges as useful not only *in* the eschaton but also in *rethinking* the eschaton. To summarise, our recollections of people's experiences of situations that have prevented or compromised the integrity of embodied life contradicts what will be in the eschaton,

and are thus themselves contradicted by a future in which embodied life is fully affirmed.

A model of contradiction is similarly alluded to by DeBorst. Firstly, she notes that Isaiah 65.17-25 lists various sufferings that "shall not" endure in the New Creation, but are rather contradicted by God's intentions for the future of creation. Framed in terms of God creating a New Jerusalem, we read that the inhabitants of this new creation:

> shall not labour in vain,
> or bear children for calamity;
> for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD –
> and their descendants as well.
> Before they call I will answer,
> while they are yet speaking I will hear (23-24).

Futile labour and calamitous existence are in this way contradicted by the nearness and blessedness of God's immediate presence in the eschaton; earlier seen as typical of the process of realising the eschaton and here, again, affirmed as the particular nature of eschatological existence. DeBorst goes on to note that, more recently, the Argentinian Commission on the Disappearance of Persons published a document detailing the disappearances, kidnappings, and abuses that occurred in pre-democracy Argentina. The document was appropriately entitled *Nunca más* (never again) (DeBorst, 2010, 47), and simultaneously exposes and opposes the oppression of the Argentinians by their previous governmental regime. These two dimensions of exposition and opposition can mutually constitute the nature of contradiction and converge in the declaration, "never again". Such protestations are similarly inferred by McFague, whereby God's love of creation and God's very presence in creation are understood to propel God's protest against death. Observing God's presence in nature's health and beauty, she similarly sees God being present in deterioriation and destruction, albeit in different ways. In the former, she detects God's presence as a "positive affirmation of God's glory through the flourishing of creation", yet in the latter, she perceives God's "negative protest against whatever is undermining God's creation" (2001, 137). The examples

provided here indicate the power of this twofold attentiveness to past experiences; a power which both honours the lived experiences and lays claim to a hopeful future for them.

McFague's observations help us to see that worth can and indeed must be located in fluidity and changeability; however, there are also instances where the deterioration and death that are contained therein are actually averse to the valuation of creation. Indeed, it is simply not the case that death always leads to an appreciation of life, as Christ and Jantzen were seen to imply in Chapter One. On both personal and ecological levels, the deaths of members of creation can, in fact, lead to grief and despondence and therefore to more death. In conjunction with this, we should also acknowledge that many may never, in their own lifetimes, experience the overcoming of oppression. In instances where oppression has *not* been overcome in the lifetime of an individual, though, the power of the divine protestation against death, coupled with the power of the future to contradict such sufferings, are intensified. Indeed, we must take seriously the fact that some lives, and in many cases *women's lives*, are characterised by suffering and death. Vento (2002, 19) makes a similar observation, noting that faith in a God who finally overcomes suffering:

> holds out hope for those already defeated and long dead women who never experienced healing in their own lifetimes, whose stories are forgotten or distorted by official histories, whose victimization was interpreted as acceptable, beneficial, or otherwise justified.

In subscribing to the view that freedom is incomplete until all are able to experience it, as my previous chapter claimed, we simply cannot be content with the attitude that this life is all there is. God's ability to offer sympathy and help in the present is simply not enough.[106] We must, then, be able to hope for those whose bodies were never anything

[106] Of course, there are some for whom their suffering in this life quashes any desire for life to continue after death; such experiences are significant for this thesis, and will accordingly be addressed later in this chapter.

other than tools for others or sites of suffering. An embodied eschatology can do precisely this by claiming an alternative ending to their story and informing ways to embody this ending now, as my next chapter will explore.

Still, our constructions of the future, informed though they are by such attentiveness, must also rely on a degree of imagination and creativity. This does not quell the power of the past, though: we remember Baker-Fletcher's observation that whilst we may not always know *how* people have overcome oppression, the very fact that they have (in some cases) inspires hope that we can do the same (1998, 30; cf. Moltmann, 1989, 37). Yet if the lived experiences we recall are limited in their specificity, we must utilise additional tools in order to aid our eschatological constructions. I add to this that as oppression continues to be experienced in the here and now, as noted, we have further cause to employ imaginative tools to envision a future void of such oppression. The creative imagining of the future need not and should not be mere utopic fantasy. Rather, it can be a generative process that sprouts from our experiential knowledge in order to grasp at novelty. Indeed, Grace Jantzen writes that invoking the imagination, when we "have become conscious of what has been repressed and are actively looking for new symbols", can be "an indispensible well-spring" (1998, 98). We have much to feed these imaginings, as was seen in my reference to the prophetic power of experiences of embodiment. Still, before more specificity is possible, it is necessary to further justify my focus on death.

There exists a problematic aspect to the suggested eschatological contradiction of death: it may seem that such a focus on death is disharmonious with wider feminist theological discussions. This perspective is understandable as the Christian tradition has long associated death with women. Firstly, Eve has been constructed as the figurehead for all women, supposedly bestowing a legacy of culpability for sin and

death. This presents a dual narrative in which all women are deemed both weakened to the temptations of sin and responsible for the result of sin which is death (cf. Isherwood, 2001, 18-9). Interestingly, but worryingly, this perspective finds materialisation in both an obsession with death and an indifference towards death. Grey observes that a "preoccupation with death has meant symbolising women as responsible for decay and death (at the same time as an indifference with women's own death)" (2009a, 352). From this, it seems as though women are deemed deserving of death because they are responsible for death. An extreme perspective, perhaps, but one that has nevertheless benefited from theological validation. Speaking of an eschatology that overcomes death, then, potentially subscribes to the gendered vilification of mortality and justifies apathy towards women's experiences of suffering and death. This is further compounded by the fact that women's bodies have been identified as holding the capability for both death and life, and that this assignation has instilled fear. Christ notes that this fear "is a consequence of a rejection of life in the body, life that comes through the body of the mother" (2003, 207; cf. 2011b, 129; Sjoo, 1992, 12; Gebara, 2002, 19). Perspectives and practices that seek to overcome death, then, have indicated a desire to overcome that which has been unequivocally associated with the female body. However, such problems do not necessarily mean that the contradiction of death in the eschatological future must be abandoned; rather, it can be reconfigured.[107]

The Many Deaths of Bodies

Just as attitudes towards death are diverse, so too are experiences of death; as DeBorst rightly observes, "Death has many faces" (2010, 44; cf. Gebara, 2002, 25). Negotiating a definition of death is thus helpful now, not only to clarify my ensuing arguments but also to highlight that the previously noted feminist critique of the tradition's

[107] In light of the perspectives noted, though, it is crucial that the absence of death does not perpetuate patriarchal constructions of a *male* future existence. This will be addressed shortly.

presentation of death need not quell our distaste for it. The first of these "faces" we can explore is death as the end to biological life.[108] If death is wholly conclusive (that is, if it marks the final and full cessation of experiences of embodied life), then it finally removes all possibility of individuals (who, as I have claimed, are inseparable from their embodiments) ever experiencing both freedom *from* suffering and freedom *for* relationship.[109] Mortality has truly triumphed over materiality: accepting death as conclusive signifies an acceptance of the final obliteration of materiality by mortality. Far from an acceptance of this death orienting us to an appreciation of life's fleetingness, as suggested by some thinkers noted earlier, it actually makes the present the sole locus of reality. In so doing, no alternatives are made available to the suffering and death we experience: our bodies cease to exist at death, rather than experiencing enduring embodiments in the future. As we have noted that experiences of embodiment are far from homogenous, we should also note here that experiences of death are varied and may even be conflicting. As Stuart observes: "one cannot be liberated from one's own body and if your body is a site of pain, a liberatory theology of disability will not be enough" (2000, 166). Although certainly not typical of all people's experiences of disability, Stuart's point is important; it may be the case that death would be welcome for those experiencing pain and suffering. Indeed, the *lack* of bodiliness that a complete cessation of existence would elicit may be the *most* hopeful future for those who experience their bodies as painful, troublesome sites. Accordingly, the prospect of an embodied eschatology may be unappealing and even oppressive.

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[108] Though I do not wish to suggest a binary split between the physical and emotional, and indeed recognise their connectedness, it is helpful to elaborate on these different dimensions of death separately.

[109] My emphasis on *experiences* of embodied life is particularly pertinent here. Although we remember that thinkers such as Ruether suggest that our bodies exist after death on account of their capacity to "contain the promise of continuing springtime, new greening that again and again makes the overcoming of drought and death possible" (2008, 337), there is no discussion of how we may experience this existence. Similarly, there is no sense in which this can help transform often painful and always personal experiences of suffering and death. Thus, whilst hopeful for the endurance of materiality, perspectives such as Ruether's are limited in their ability to speak of a hopeful future for *experiences* of embodiment.

Yet, it is difficult to reconcile the God of the previous chapter, who so loves and honours creation, with one who offers no alternative to such experiences of embodiment. It is possible, then, to claim that painful experiences of embodiment signify that the *pain and suffering* of bodies must be contradicted, and not bodies themselves. There are, of course, questions to be asked here concerning whether such a distinction can be made; questions that I will address in the latter part of this chapter. For now, my aim is to highlight that such attempts are legitimate; they do not discredit painful experiences of embodiment but they do hope for their transformation. Indeed, Stuart (2000, 166) notes that even when one's body is a site of pain,

> this does not rule out the possibilities of a new form of bodiliness in which pain and suffering is absent and the processes of creation continue disrupting all our perceived notions of materiality. Therefore, the beliefs that the resurrection involves some kind of bodily change and that bodies continue to bear the scars of human contingency are not necessarily incompatible. Indeed they are mysteriously connected.

Nancy Eiesland calls this a "liberatory realism" which does not indicate a "utopian vision of hope as the erasure of all contingency" but rather signifies a recognition and acceptance of one's bodily limits (1994, 103). Stuart and Eiesland thus illustrate how some embodied "limits", or perhaps we may say embodied experiences and effects, must endure in the eschatological future if identity is to be honoured. An embodied eschatology can, then, without contradiction, embrace both the continuity and discontinuity of embodied existences by honouring the experiences of those whose bodies are a site of pain, and offering the chance for such troubled bodies to experience their embodiments in new ways.

Still, similar to the ways in which death may, for some, signify liberation from the pains of embodied lives, death is further complexified by the fact that many people, and women in particular, have used death to escape from the evils of life. Gebara, in her book *Out of the Depths*, provides a moving account of various women whose lives have been so controlled by patriarchal powers that death seemed for them the only way to

be released from the grip of patriarchy (2002, 22-34). In this way, death may be interpreted as a form of protest against the patriarchal powers that would curtail women's expressions of power. Choosing death, in this context, may be the ultimate *nunca más* (never again) – a woman's ultimate statement that oppression and violence will never again be practised on her body. However, in light of God's love for embodied creation and loyalty to fulfilled relationships with them, we can challenge the structures and systems that cause and enable death to have such power. In situations where life has become so unbearable that death becomes welcome, we can express a hope for those who have, in this way, lost hope. An embodied eschatology can thus become the *hopeful* "never again" that contradicts the despairing "never again" that is sought in death. An embodied eschatology can tell those who are suffering that although death may end their suffering, God desires and intends more for their lives than for it to simply be free of suffering.[110] This can bolster and hearten protestations that strive for life amidst the death-dealing powers being experienced.

The second "face" of death is the emotional face. The very final point of physical, biological death is inevitably identical for each individual: in short, bodies cease to take breath, cease to live. "Emotional deaths", however, are neither conclusive nor uniform: they are experienced in a cacophony of different ways, endure throughout individual lives, and do not always culminate in physical death. For this reason (and for reasons also noted earlier) any discussion of them can only ever be partial. As Gebara rightly observes, "Whatever is said will never be able to contain exactly what has been lived" (2002, 41). We can, however, note *some* of the ways in which these deaths are experienced. Constructed in terms of "lack", Gebara identifies some Latin American and African women's experiences of lack of power, worth, and education, all of which culminate in a powerlessness (2002, 42), or a death of power. An alternative

[110] This also speaks to the importance of seeking novelty in the content of the eschatological future, rather than simply negating what should not be; this will later be developed.

perspective is offered by Bringle, who speaks from a western context and suggests that death may be experienced as the death of identity. Whereas this once occurred through the marginalisation of women, she claims that many women now risk the assimilation of their femaleness into a normative maleness. She writes that "Instead of being the inferior 'other' to man, we risk becoming his identical twin" (1980, 155) in order to be deemed culturally acceptable or successful.[111] Not only has patriarchal theology associated death with women, and caused the deaths of women in their embodied lives, then, but it has also required women to die countless emotional deaths.[112] If eschatology is instead built on the understanding of embodied change as being indicative of empowerment and identity, it can contradict such death-dealing experiences by proclaiming their impermanence and alterity to the intentions of God. It can also signal a radical, even subversive, existence where power-in-relation and the fulfilment of particular identities are presented as tangible possibilities.

Indeed, it is in response to such experiences that I am compelled to express a dissatisfaction with death and with all of the other deaths that so often precede it. Death can be understood to be the ultimate preventer of the transformation of embodied sufferings, the endurance of embodied relationships, and the abundance of dynamic embodiments. Attentiveness to the language used is necessary here: I purposefully choose to speak of transformation rather than "healing" for a number of reasons. Whilst much talk about the eschatological Kingdom of God (or, perhaps more accurately, the "kin-dom" of God) and its experience in the present makes reference to signs of wholeness and healing (see Jantzen, 2009, 161; Moltmann, 2004a, 6), there are

[111] We have already seen how eschatological constructions have epitomised this assimilation by prioritising a spiritual existence that seeks to do away with women's embodied lives, hence my desire to reconfigure the former and revalue the latter.

[112] This is not to one-dimensionally construct women only as victims; I am aware that women can and do often *cause* sufferings and deaths, and that men too experience such suffering and death. My intention here, however, is to indicate that women's lives are more entrenched with these on account of the theoretical and symbolic association of women with death and the lived experiences of some women who encounter death in the ways noted here.

two problems to be addressed here. Firstly, the effects of sufferings upon people are often so grave and vast that the removal or reversal of those sufferings may be impossible. Conradie expresses this with more clarity, asserting that "Some forms of injustice are almost irreversible" as they have lasting, destructive effects, and that "Salvation cannot undo the traumatic experience itself" (2005, 265). This does, though, present a somewhat narrow understanding of healing. Healing is not and cannot be reliant on the sufferings being *reversed*. Given that I previously argued for a God who is intimately involved with creation, it would be inconsistent to here suggest that God can somehow manipulate time in order to reverse it. To do so would ultimately be *disloyal* to the experiences of a creation who are incontrovertibly temporal. Rather, speaking of eschatological healing may be able to communicate the embrace of a God who both takes loss into Godself and transforms it into life.

Granted, this is still a difficult concept: given the intensity and severity of some sufferings, the transformation of them may be an arduous process. In recognition of this, Vento (2002, 14) cites women's experiences of trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He writes that:

> Women who are victims of such severe trauma require long periods of recovery with explicit attention to regaining the sense of self lost through violence and its aftermath.

For Vento, the language of healing is accurate as it communicates the process of acknowledging, mourning, and finally finding restoration from the traumatic experience (2002, 14). In light of this, eschatological existence understood as healing cannot simply be an instantaneous transference from suffering to non-suffering existence. Again, the importance of the process being one that takes time is highlighted. The particularities of individual sufferings must, then, be attended to in order for healing to be authentic and lasting. Healing here is not merely the cessation of suffering but a process by which the individual finally experiences a joyous and

peaceful embodied existence. This is made possible by a God who is *both* with us, (and therefore able to understand that which we require healing from), and for us (to such a degree that this healing can be achieved), as argued in Chapter Two.

However, there remains another, more challenging problem with the use of the language of "healing". Just as with agency in my previous chapter, theologies of disability have highlighted the inadequacy and potential inappropriateness of the language of healing. Morris notes that "healing narratives" such as Luke 4.18-21, wherein Jesus speaks of being sent to proclaim the "recovery of sight to the blind" (Luke 4.18), have been interpreted as being indicative of the nature of the Kingdom of God, as I have here illustrated. The problem arises when such healing is interpreted in terms of a "cure" and thought to mean "for disabled people, the removal of their disability and subsequent normalization" (Morris, 2011, 128).[113] Morris bases his critique on healing being constructed as a condition for inclusion in God's salvation plan. However, I have already argued for a universally inclusive eschatology and negotiated the retention of particularity within this universality. As such, the focus of the problem for *this* thesis shifts a little. What Morris's contribution compels me to consider is whether embodied lives in the eschatological future require some kind of transformation and whether it can be at all legitimate to construct this transformation in terms of healing. Whilst the language of healing may, in some cases, be appropriate and accurate, this latter critique suggests we consider alternative or additional articulations. The language of transformation can, I feel, convey the processual and personal elements that talk of healing may also transmit, whilst avoiding associations with cure and normalization. Moreover, "transformation" can speak more directly than "healing" to a dynamic process of change that continually affirms embodied lives and contradicts their deaths.

[113] Attending to the nature of Jesus' resurrected body further helps us to consider the inappropriateness of such talk, and so will be thoroughly engaged with later in this chapter.

## Features of an Embodied Eschaton

### Deathless Change

A true appreciation of embodied changes cannot, however, ignore Carol Christ's observation (2011b, 133) that change is concurrent with (though not limited to) the experience of decay and, ultimately, death. Change and fluidity have often found articulation in such allusions to limitations and finitude. This rests on the assumption that that which changes ceases to be what it once was, and ultimately ceases to change. Conradie notes that "the problem remains here that the sting of finitude is death" (2005, 305). Whether this be the death of moments, of experiences, of relationships, or the ultimate death of bodies, change seems synonymous with finitude. This suggests that if change *is* to be part of our eschatological existence, then death and decay must also feature. Questions are raised in light of this about whether God's love for and loyalty to creation can ever be complete: if death endures in the eschaton then the eschaton would seem to be characterised by a ceaseless cessation of bodies and relations. This poses the most substantial challenge to an eschatology that is embodied: the endurance of bodies entails an endurance of change, but an endurance of change potentially entails a lack of completeness. In short, it appears that future fullness of life cannot be wholly achieved if bodies continue to *embody* change in the form of decay and death.

There is a marked need to focus here not only on women's bodies but also the earth body, as female bodies and the earth body have both suffered a similar and simultaneous fate under patriarchal theology. Both have been vilified through the claim that they alone embody change and transience, which have been deemed to culminate in or even cause death. Genesis 8.22, for example, asserts that "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night,

shall not cease". However it is this very seasonality that proves problematic as what it entails, even requires, is a cyclical process of loss and death. The problem is exacerbated by Hall (2006, 31), who notes that, ecologically speaking, the lives of some members of creation, some aspects of the earth, actually *depend* on the death of others. He writes:

> The teleological end of an acorn is to become an oak; and that 'transcendent' purpose is also contained within the structure and substance of the acorn. In a real sense, therefore, disintegration and integration, destruction and fulfilment, death and life are present in every organism.

Although Hall is not necessarily envisioning the acorn and the oak tree as two separate subjects, his proposal does lead one to question whether the eschatological cessation of death means that the acorn endures and the oak tree can never live. It seems that the two cannot simultaneously endure. This adds to the problematic assertion that change is inseparable from death, and so challenges concepts of an eschatologically enduring changeability.

Yet, there are many who argue that change is *unproblematically* founded on this finitude that embraces and enables death. It is not *finitude* that must be overcome, Jantzen writes, but rather *the desire to overcome finitude* (1998, 155; cf. Suchocki, 1977, 296). This returns us to the suggestion that the most appropriate response to death is to accept it as an inescapable and integral part of life. Keller expands on this, claiming that a "death-free creation [is] unimaginable without *reconstituting* the very elements of which all life is made" (2003b, 419). Creation, it would seem, is so accustomed to the experience of death that a cessation of death would compromise the very heart of creation's identity. This challenges my earlier allusions to a changing, deathless eschatology marking a *fulfilled* sense of identity, and suggests that life would not be life if it were endless; if death were not its conclusion. Thus, again, if change is to endure in the eschatological future it seems necessary that death must also.

In responding to and attempting to overcome this problem, it is clear that the way forward cannot be to reject the association of women with change and fluidity, and claim that women are static beings. Keller cautions against such attempts, writing that "A woman without flux […] is no mother of feminism" (2003a, 79). Indeed, if we were instead to privilege stability and to name this as a hallmark of all existences, we would simply be expanding the patriarchal appraisal of male-defined traits and denying the appreciation of fluidity in all existences. Rather, what we should strive to do is reconfigure the association of bodiliness, and women's bodies in particular, with death. Christ further helps our considerations here by asserting that "Not to be embodied, not to change, is not to be alive" (2003, 45). We can re-affirm, then, that it is change and not death that characterises all life. Possessing life does not mean one day dying, but rather living with and in changing and fluid embodied existences. As such, we can legitimately construct an eschatological future that is void of death without imagining a future void of change. Whilst difficult, this is not impossible: Bauckham, reading Moltmann, claims that he sees temporality and fluidity as being ambiguous. He writes that creation is "open to both constructive possibilities and destructive possibilities" (1999b, 18). One of these "constructive possibilities" can be the quest for a future that presents a positive view of embodied changes whilst maintaining its ability to contradict death. Baker-Fletcher (2003, 86) believes such a task is legitimate, as she ponders:

> Perhaps within the divine aim is an end to death but not to cycles of perpetual perishing and becoming in which entities regenerate through a dynamic process of recreation or renewal as subjects experience the increase of God's own glory or satisfaction.

The separation of perpetual perishing from death that Baker-Fletcher speaks of may seem somewhat untenable, given the contentions raised; however, a rethinking of change can elucidate the feasibility of her suggestion.

The Transformation of Change[114]

Transformation in the eschatological future can mean that bodies retain their particularities even as they are enabled to become more; to endure eternally. Moltmann, whilst evidently interpreting the Kingdom of God in terms of healing, as noted, is careful to retain a sense of the endurance of physical joys and sorrows, pains and pleasures, albeit in a *transformed* manner. Considering the meaning and importance of the resurrection assists Moltmann's thinking: speaking of resurrected life, he claims that "'Resurrection' always also means transformation" (2004b, 162) and this transformation means that:

> Even wounds that have healed can still be seen from the scars they have left, though they no longer hurt. Even if the tears of grief are wiped away and the grief has been turned into joy, the eyes are still wet.

We may wonder whether the scars and tears can possibly remain without them hurting, and moreover whether we would want them to. It is not only true that the memory of suffering can itself be painful, but it is also the case that suffering can have an irreversible impact on the formation of identity. Scars and wounds touch our very bodies in penetrative and enduring ways. Tina Takemoto (reading Parveen Adams) notes that "although a scar may be healed, it nevertheless opens you up continuously to the previous time of the open wound, a continuous reopening of the wound" (2001, 112). The feasibility of a future void of suffering is thus brought into dispute: it seems either impossible or potentially undesirable for the contingency of embodied beings. However, the above quotation from Moltmann provides ample scope with which to respond to this. Looking from the perspective of the future, we can claim that the formative impact of suffering(s) on identities is not obliterated by the endurance of

[114] This reference to transformation may seem to speak more to considerations of the eschatological process, but the emphasis here is different. The previous chapter focussed on the process of coming *to* the eschaton; here, I speak of transformation *in* the eschaton, as a feature of eschatological existence.

bodies in the eschatological future. Individual identities are certainly moulded and shaped by their sufferings and this cannot be discounted in the eschaton.

Still, suffering is not the only contributing factor to the formation of identity; whether numerous or rare, we are also formed by positive experiences of love, in whatever form(s). That such love typifies and is experienced fully in the eschatological future, as my previous chapter claimed, means that we will then be able to remember our sufferings from a place of security. The sufferings have formed us, partially or substantially, but they can no longer hurt us. Similarly, the presence of those who have *caused* the scars and the tears can no longer hurt us. This is not to make light of the pain but rather to view it from the perspective of a future where the overwhelming experience will be one of relational compassion. In cases where this pain has a creaturely cause, the gracious embrace of God will provide ample space in relationships. This means that the realities of relationships are honoured: pain is acknowledged and forgiveness is not enforced.[115] Still, all are held in the embrace of God which feels compassion both for the individual who has suffered and the individual who has caused that suffering. This is, understandably, a difficult if not impossible concept for some; however I maintain that it is only in such a future that all may individually experience the love and freedom in relationship that is both God's nature and intention. Furthermore, the loving embrace of God, as I have consistently claimed, provides a space which is wide enough for this process to take time, and a caress which is intimate enough to gently reveal to us that "we are beloved and so is everyone else" (Vanier, 1999, 159).[116] This will, of course, be different for each individual as embodied sufferings are experienced and interpreted in various ways. It is for this reason that the

[115] This spacious relationality resurfaces in Chapter Four when we come to consider some ways in which a tactile embrace of others can be comprised of touching the space between ourselves others. In some cases, such as those where abuse is present, this is deemed to be a more appropriate practice of tactility.

[116] Within this it is also appropriate to explore the feasibility of practising forgiveness; a possibility which will be explored most substantially in the next chapter.

future is necessarily both particular and universal: God shall in the end effect the transformation of *all* individuals as *individuals*.

Moreover, there must be a correlation between the process of transformation and that which we are transformed to, as earlier claimed. We may say, then, that an eschatological change occurs so that change may endure eschatologically. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 15.35-57, with its unequivocal emphasis on the resurrection of the body, aid my thinking here. The passage specifies that the resurrected body is characterised by "imperishability" and "immortality" (15.53). This need not and should not be used to refer to bodies being discarded and *replaced* by different, imperishable, immortal bodies. Rather, verse 51 which proclaims the "mystery" that "We will not all die, but we will all be changed" can be read as asserting that mortal bodies will be *changed* to become imperishable and immortal. Similarly, referring to the bodily transformation depicted in Ezekiel 11.19, which speaks of creation being given a "heart of flesh", Moltmann claims that "The new creation doesn't abolish bodiliness. It renews it for eternal livingness" (1997, 24-25). Bodiliness is deemed to endure, then, albeit in a transformed manner. It is important, however, to exercise caution in these attempts to articulate the transformed nature of eschatological bodies. Potentially, such constructions could come too close to the patriarchal theological depiction of a spiritually embodied existence in the eschaton. As noted in Chapter One, promoting such an existence merely upholds the binary oppositions of the male and the spirit over and above the female and the material. Moreover, there is the possibility that an emphasis on transformed bodily existences undermines life as it is experienced now. Yet if we attend to and interpret bodies not only as the inescapable location of our identities but also as God's intended homes for us, and furthermore as the sites from which we construct eschatology and as inseparable from eschatology, we see that such perspectives cannot legitimately be upheld.

Indeed, the affirmation of thoroughly material bodies can and should be *achieved* and not *thwarted* by eschatological considerations. Moltmann claims that the eternal life we are to experience is not a *different* life from the one we experience now, but is rather a life that makes this life different (1997, 22). Material life endures but is made different, is "derestricted" (Bauckham, 1999b, 16), so that it may be *enabled* to endure. Moltmann is emphatic about not rejecting the physicality of lived existences, as elsewhere he writes that "it is this mortal, this lived, and this loved life which will be raised, healed, reconciled, completed, and thus find its divine destiny" (2010, 62). Embodied life is not, then, rejected in favour of either a disembodied or spiritually embodied future. Rather, physical embodiments arrive at their completion, are experienced in full, and are eternally imperishable in the eschatological future. Importantly, change can and should remain a central feature of this eschatological physicality, this future embodied life, for bodies have not lost anything that constitutes their bodily identity. We may even claim that identities increase as bodies embrace the dynamism of enduring change.

We can also consider the possibility of this change occurring and enduring within the full and final realisation of eschatological embodiment, as opposed to change indicating the movement from life to death. To rearticulate Moltmann's perspective, we may say that our material existences are not dislocated from their materiality but rather change so that materiality can become more than it presently is. The initial change in the eschaton enables an enduring change that does not entail death and decay. Hagner (1998, 119) expresses a similar perspective, and writes:

> The transformation of the old creation into a new creation will, therefore, involve the redemption of our corruptible bodies from their bondage to decay. And it is at this point that the tangibility of the body of Jesus, whose resurrection is prototypical, is important.

We see allusions here as to how the resurrection narrative can aid our thinking about eschatological bodies. Jesus' resurrected existence is thoroughly material, and affected by the material, but this materiality differs from its pre-resurrection state. Rather than denying, rejecting, or forgetting his pain, Jesus' scarred skin signifies both a remembrance of pain and a re-membering of his body. Indeed, Mount-Shoop argues that this is precisely the message of the Incarnation: a faith which feels and re-members bodies (2010, 48). Resurrected bodies, then, are these present bodies made different, as Moltmann was seen to argue. Moltmann's claim concerning the endurance of scars and tears is here affirmed, but again the feasibility of their endurance must be explained. Jesus' resurrected body can be viewed as one which honours life lived in a body whilst at the same time exposing the pain experienced in that body as being impermanent. Jesus does not mask his marks, but reveals them in order to show their impotence in the face of resurrected life. The pain that was experienced is not denied, but it is no longer experienced as pain. Thus, we may say that whilst we will remember the pain in the eschaton, we will not remember *in* pain.

Our bodies continue to change, then, because our resurrections effect a new kind of change: one that does not culminate in death. We remember that bodies were said to change so that embodied change may endure. Endurance of our bodies is integral to the contingency of the eschaton, but we can only endure as we are if a change occurs; a change that both honours our bodies particularities and identities and their creative capacity to survive and endure, and also enables them to become more than they presently are. As Stuart writes, "perfect humanity seems to include an embracing of the contingency of human life and an 'unself-pitying, painstaking survival'" (Stuart, 2000, 172, citing Eiesland, 1994, 104). Again, this does not infer a *different* life, but rather a life made more than it presently is. Jantzen's exploration of transcendence and immanence is again beneficial, and she expresses a similar perspective wherein she

affirms bodies whilst also conveying the need for a *transcendent* horizon. Jantzen argues that it is possible to speak of transcending our bodies, as "more things can rightly be said of [a person] than are reducible to statements about her physical composition" (1998, 271). Thus transcendence, for Jantzen, acknowledges the complexity and depth of being.

In addition to this, Jantzen refers to transcendence in order to articulate her understanding of becoming: there is a sense in which the self is extended through embodied transcendence. To explain, Jantzen's construction of a transcendent future horizon differentiates this future from the present. She claims that individuals have within them a capacity for transcendence which does not mean becoming disembodied but rather means becoming "embodied in loving, thoughtful, and creative ways" (1998, 271). This is not to say that, for Jantzen, transcendence expresses a distant goal, but rather one that can only be sought within immanence, that is embodiment, as "physical complexity" enables the achievement of intelligence or creativity (1998, 271). For Jantzen, then, the future is neither disembodied nor distant, and personhood does not seek an eschatological end-goal. Rather, her understanding of the transcendent horizon asserts that personhood is to be sought in the constant process of becoming transcendentally embodied. Whilst Jantzen may reject any future-eschatological dimension to this, we may use her explorations to affirm bodiliness whilst simultaneously claiming that we can, in the eschatological future, experience existences where the intermingling of transcendence and immanence allows for ever-mutating, never-depleting experiences of embodiment.

Embodied experiences of change do not *require* death, then, but may instead be typified by the *transformation of death to life*. Referring back to the acorn and oak tree scenario, the acorn in this understanding finds its existence fulfilled in becoming an oak tree; this

is "creation brought to its fullest, most abundant potential in God's future" (Hessel-Robinson, 2010, 19). Change can thus continue to be present in our future eschatological bodies, as we are enabled to change *within* our bodies rather than our bodies changing from life to death. The earth body, like our bodies, is transformed so that life no longer necessitates death but is rather characterised by change. Seasonality, then, remains in the eschatological future, but without the tragedy of loss and decay. Certainly, this requires a vivid imagination to consider how summer can change into autumn without leaves falling, flowers withering, and fruit rotting. But again we recall the notion of transformation; all shall be held together in a web of embodied relations that does not allow space for erosion or sorrow but rather weaves each change together into embodiments that abound with dynamism.

The Transformation of Death

Just as change is transformed in the eschaton in order that it no longer culminates in death, so too can we claim that death will be transformed (and, in this way, contradicted). The resurrection narrative, alongside some women's experiences of their bodies as birthing bodies, again emerges as being particularly helpful in thinking about this transformation. Both make manifest the ability to be generative; to create something new. Williams, for instance, claims that "Jesus conquered sin through his living, not through his dying" (as cited by Crawford, 2002, 96). Whilst Williams retains the notion of conquest, she reframes it in order to emphasise the power of life.[117] Williams's goal here is to emphasise the divine prioritisation of life over death. Rosemary A. Carbine (2006, 95) develops this by refusing to see the cross as the unique and defining aspect of Jesus' life. Instead, she writes:

> From an eschatological perspective, the cross is critically reclaimed as one among multiple aspects of Jesus' life that signify his full humanity as well as his multidimensional struggle for human flourishing.

[117] Whether this truly overcomes the problems with the language of conquest is certainly debatable, but Williams is nevertheless helpful in providing an alternative perspective on this.

For Carbine then, the cross is interpreted as being indicative of Jesus' human experience of suffering, which forms one part of his entire life's struggle against oppression. Monica A. Coleman adds to this that such a belief can serve as a source of empowerment. She writes that "Just as Jesus overcame his persecution and suffering in the resurrection from death, black women will also overcome their situations of oppression" (2008, 15). This suggests that it is, in fact, *out of* death and not *away from it* that life is brought to its fullest experience.[118] Jesus' resurrection, in addition to elucidating the endurance or contingency of embodied life, can also be interpreted as being indicative of a new, eschatological life that transforms death into an even more abundant experience of embodied life.[119]

Resurrection as a model for new life can thus be central to imagining an eschatological future where death does not obtain but is, rather, transformed into new life. However, given a perceived necessity to attend to some ways in which women experience their bodies, more discussion is necessary. Again, the resurrection narrative of Jesus provides further fuel for our discussion here, as it makes women central to the experience of new life. Hagner notes that it is to women that Jesus communicates the first message of his resurrected life (1998, 109). Here, it is as though the tomb of Jesus has been transformed into a womb from which Jesus is birthed into new life. The message of new life is then transferred from the stone womb to the fleshy womb, as the two Marys are called to birth the resurrection story to others (see Matthew 28.7-10, Mark 16.7-8, and Luke 24.9). This is a story of new life that is birthed to others by these women, which indicates that the birthing metaphor has more than just literal meaning.

[118] This is an extremely important consideration for those whose existences are characterised by suffering, and it also suggests that a rethinking of death and the resurrection is possible, as this chapter has argued.

[119] There are other problems with referring to Jesus here, as his resurrected body seemed, in some ways, to be *disembodied*, noticeable in his apparent ability to transgress material boundaries. This need not, however, refer to a formless or fleshless body, but rather can confirm that in the eschaton our bodies will change in new and surprising ways.

Still, the resurrection story can depict an eschatological life that does not vilify or usurp the birthing experiences of some women. Instead, it centralises them. Even greater affirmation is provided when we take account of the fact that Jesus relies on the voices of women to communicate his resurrection. This was a radical move, particularly when read from our context where it is only relatively recently that women have begun to have their voices heard (cf. Keller, 2008, 907). Jesus' resurrection, then, emphasises an overwhelming life: one that transforms both biological death and all the symbolism held therein, and also the institutional deaths caused by the silencing of women.[120] This again signals the possibility of eschatology displaying attentiveness to lived experiences as it transforms death in all of its multiform complexity.

This assertion directs us back to considerations of the nature of God. Death prevents creation's full, final, and enduring experience of relationships with God, hence the need for a future that transforms mortality for the sake of relationality. Moltmann (1981, 92), though evidently cautious about overly-constructive approaches to eschatology, nevertheless speaks confidently and positively about God's negation of death. He claims that because God is:

> 'Lord of both the dead and of the living' (Rom. 14.9) he [*sic*.] cannot rest until death too has been destroyed. But if death is no more, then Christ with his life-giving Spirit has made all the dead live.

[120] There are, to be sure, issues here: Rambo notes that examples of women speaking and writing theology do not inherently or automatically mean that women were liberated in doing so. "*What* they speak", she argues, "cannot be overshadowed by the fact *that* they speak" (2011, 40), with women's speech often indicating "not the power to speak her own truth but the power to speak *the Truth*, something that comes from outside of her" (2011, 46). In the instance referred to here, it is the male Jesus who is both the enabler and the subject of the message that the women bear. Furthermore, in Mark and Luke's accounts the women's message was received with incredulity as opposed to open acceptance (see Mark 16.11 and Luke 24.11). Indeed, we read in Luke that "these words seemed to them an idle tale" (24.11). Thus there are certainly problematic gender dynamics present here. However, Rambo invites us to consider an alternative perspective: she argues that women can "inhabit traditional theological houses without being imprisoned by them" (2011, 52). The message I am concerned with here is that of a future which finds articulate expression in qualities assigned to and some experiences of women's bodies. This suggests that whilst being conveyed within the confines of a masculine culture and context, the women as message-bearers and the message that they bear *is* liberating.

We can see here that God's commitment to life is understood as necessitating the transformation of death in order that all are able to lastingly experience life. God's life is thus drawn to completion as creation is enabled to experience their embodied lives in fullness in the eschaton. Again, this is a collaborative process: eschatologically embodied lives are actuated in divine-creaturely partnership. Here, we can appeal to the story of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37.1-14 to further comprehend this partnership. In this instance, God does not create life from an abyss and without help, but rather from the very materiality of creation with the assistance of Ezekiel, who prophesies to the bones. McFague has observed these dynamics, and writes that "The power of life can override the reality of death with the help of God's partners", as Ezekiel mediates the word of God and the wind gives life to the dry bones (2001, 171). The contradiction of death is not, then, an action of God alone, wholly removed from the actions and intentions of creation. Rather, God's contradiction of death calls for the cooperation of creation in making the affirmation, and indeed the creation, of eschatological life a reality.[121] God's own life requires the lives of all of creation, then, but this cannot be reduced down to necessity alone. Life is not only *required* but is also *desired* by God. We detect this in passages such as Isaiah 25.8 which speaks of God's intention to "swallow up death for ever". Death is thus transformed by creation's cooperation with God and by God's desire to embrace the bodies of creation and caress them into experiences of fully embodied lives; that is, lives which are dynamic and void of death.

Moreover, we can frame this resurrection, this eschatological transformation from death to life, in terms of natality. I again utilise, or "futurise", Grace Jantzen's symbolic

[121] Synthesis emerges here with my previous chapter's claims concerning the call for creation to help create the eschaton. We remember that this was not deemed to be indicative of worth or status. Instead, it was seen to reveal both the relationality of God as God is touched by creation, and also how creation can create this by helping others and oneself to experience relational freedom.

of natality here. Jantzen argues that natality is no more to be associated with birth than mortality is with death: it may be a corollary of it but is not exhaustibly defined by it. Indeed, Graham writes that Jantzen insisted that her use of natality "is a long way from any kind of celebration of 'Mother God' or goddess, or of the maternal as unimpeachable" (2009a, 17). Rather, Jantzen writes, natality communicates "the potential for newness and for hope, the creative possibilities of beginning again that are introduced into the world by the fact that we are all natals" (2009, 8; cf. 1998, 144).[122] This is unequivocally embodied, as "natality cannot be thought of without body and gender" (Jantzen, 2009, 48; cf. 1998, 136), and it is unequivocally universal as we are indeed all birthed into newness through the material process of being birthed. Still, in spite of Jantzen not presenting a "paean to actual motherhood, nor a simplistic appeal to maternal values", she does offer a "recognition of women as vital and necessary participants in the ultimate creative act of new life – birth" (Joy, 2009, 33). This can lead us into considering ways in which some women's experiences of the birthing process can be used to rethink the content of the eschaton. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore (1994, 138; cf. 142), for example, draws on her own experiences of mothering in order to create a theology of motherhood that reclaims its interpretive and experiential significance. Acknowledging the suppression and marginalisation of this, she nevertheless asserts that:

> Women's reproductive labor does have redemptive, life-giving dimensions of a certain kind. Mother-love may be among the greatest sources of spiritual and moral insight.

This insight, she claims, exemplifies a certain type of familial relationality that was at the heart of Jesus' message (1994, 138-139). As my previous chapter emphasised the importance of relationality, I certainly endorse this interpretation of the theological value of motherhood. It can, indeed, speak to us of a future where all bodies are held in the relational embrace of a mothering God, which is wide enough for each to retain

[122] This reference to "newness" will be explored in more depth later on in this chapter.

their particularity and to experience enduring change. And yet, the motif of motherhood is not unproblematic.

Firstly, we should note that some women feel a lack of enjoyment in experiencing motherhood. Indeed, Isaiah 49.15 questions: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you". This recognises the cacophony of experiences of birthing, and that birth is neither joyous for nor does it elicit compassion in all women.[123] However, what is depicted here is a God who both acknowledges and transcends these experiences. God is the Mother who cannot abandon any of her children but rather embraces each one of them, drawing them into the experience of the fullness of life which has both its origin and purpose in God. This not only gives hope for children whose experience of being mothered is fraught with difficulty, but it also provides hope for mothers who have struggled to mother.[124] Again, the contradiction of embodied pain is enabled by an affirmation of God's love for and loyalty to embodied experiences *and* God's ability to transcend these experiences. Even in less extreme cases, it provides hope for mothers who have experienced feelings of failure in their mothering practices. In this construction, *all* are embraced in the sufficiency and empathy with and in which God gives and embraces life.

A more sensitive matter to negotiate is the fact that some women who desire to be mothers do not even have this opportunity to succeed in or struggle with mothering. I have been compelled to think in this direction by L .Serene Jones's article "Hope

[123] Cullinan also makes this observation with reference to some women's experiences of fistula, noting the politicised and sexualised discrediting of such suffering (2008, 96-97). This further substantiates the need to simultaneously attend to the complexities and difficulties of women's experiences of their bodies, and particularly some women's experiences of birthing, and also to conceive of a God who both empathises with and ultimately transforms suffering.
[124] We remember that this is not a presentation of God as a supernatural and inaccessible model of motherhood but rather a reformulation of God as mother who shares in our pains and draws us all to the embracing body of God.

Deferred", in which she retells and reflects on her friend's experience of suffering a miscarriage. Here, we see the reverse of the resurrection story: whereas the tomb there became a womb, Jones's friend's womb becomes a tomb. Her friend, Wendy, is forced to confront her realisation that "My womb is a death bed, my body a grave" (2001, 235). Jones's reflections on this provide a window of hope for the tragic experience, and enable us to think of a new model for eschatology that embraces not only women who experience their bodies giving birth, but also women who experience their bodies as unable to birth; of having their ability to birth taken away from them. Referring to the crucifixion, Jones claims that Jesus' death occurred in the very depths of God, even in God's womb, and as such indicated God's ability to take death into God's very being (2001, 242). The experience of death within life that occurs when a woman's body miscarries can, in this way, be understood as mirroring God's experience of loss on the cross. This is not to romanticise or divinise the woman's suffering, nor should it subsume women's experiences or make them pale in comparison. Rather, it indicates "God's solidarity with them" (Jones, 2001, 242); God's empathy with the embodied encountering of loss and sorrow that typify many women's experiences of miscarriage.

And yet, as I have consistently argued, God's engagement with creation is not exhausted at the point of empathy: God expresses both power-with creation and power-for creation. What this means in this context is that God is able to empathise with experiences of simultaneously embodying life and death, whilst remaining more than these experiences. God is able to embrace and transform these deaths by enveloping them in God's life and therein caressing them into new lives of their own. Referring back to Jones (2001, 243), I understand her reflections as holding together God's empathy-with her friend with God's transcendence of the suffering that has necessitated that empathy. She imagines her friend:

> finding great solace in her solidarity with this God who has born such loss, her sense of utter aloneness melting away. I also imagine Wendy looking at God and being even more amazed and comforted by the differences between herself and this God that holds her.

Rothwell notes a similar experience being expressed by a woman named Eileen when discussing the early death of her daughter. Eileen relays how her daughter, "newly born and baptized", was rushed to hospital without Eileen ever seeing her. Rothwell observes that it seemed, for Eileen, that this religious rite of passage denied her the chance to "love and comfort her baby". Still, Rothwell goes on to write that "in the midst of her pain and silenced by Church and society", Eileen still prayed and encountered God as "an almighty, all-loving, non-judgemental, merciful God" (2013, 135). In such experiences, as with those noted by Jones, we can say that the embrace of God takes loss and death into Godself in such a way that God is deeply touched by the experience, and also able to sustain us in those experiences and ultimately to transform them into new experiences of life.

Jennifer Hurd further helps us to see the impact of such notions and their resonance with maternal imagery. Relaying the response of one of her interviewees, named "S" in her study, Hurd notes that "For S, as for others, the divine was found to be present in the tomb-like abyss, which in turn became a womb-like place of natal flourishing" (2013, 203). Again, then, God's presence is such that God experiences our sorrow, pain, loss and death with us but also helps those experiences to be transformed into new experiences of flourishing life. Indeed, Moltmann makes note of both Jesus' experience of the loss of God's presence, and God's experience of the loss of Jesus in the crucifixion (1981, 81), seemingly highlighting that the fleetingness of temporal existence can legitimately be said to be part of God's experience of creation. And yet, in the midst of the authentic experience of such fleetingness, God must simultaneously transcend such transience lest creation be resigned to accepting the "irrevocable loss of the past but also the ambiguities of the present and the uncertainties of the future" (Jantzen, 1984a,

57). Whilst some may seek to be reconciled with such transience (see Christ, 2003, 116; Suchocki, 1977, 296; Sands as cited by Keller, 1996a, 134), I contend that an acceptance of transience produces a limited hope, as there is no possible alternative to the griefs and sorrows experienced, as I earlier contended.[125] Eschatological life, then, may simply (though certainly not ineffectually or insignificantly) pertain to a recognition of the compassion of others and of God, but it can be much more than this. If we think eschatologically, the transformation of death into life embraces the emotional states of life, as I have argued, but also fully and finally enables material experiences of bodies transformed from death into abundant and eternal life.

If death can be contradicted by its transformation, we may now wish to consider some ways in which we can mourn or grieve for the deceased in a way that embraces and anticipates this transformation.[126] An eschatological appreciation of embodiments means that we must come to terms with the complete, albeit temporary, cessation of the individual's existence. It would be incongruent with an affirmation of embodiments to consider those individuals to be merely living on in a different (typically thought of as a "spiritual") mode. Such a concept compromises both embodiment and relationality and, as Herbert (2006, 123) rightly notes, provides:

> a weak kind of consolation because it conveys something of a fragmented and incomplete vision of salvation, depicting the deceased as alive but having to consciously wait for the gradual piecing-together of the network of relationships they left behind.

Conceiving of the deceased as still existing in a disembodied manner is undoubtedly comforting to some, as such thought allows one to consider the deceased as no longer suffering but still capable of communicating with those who are alive. Such concepts were also understood to be comforting for the individual experiencing the suffering, as

[125] Of course, transient life is not *only* comprised of grief and sorrow, but they are certainly aspects of it and often have immense effects on individual lives. To reiterate, it is for this reason that I navigate here the possibility of an eschatological future that is void of death.
[126] This signals the beginning of my construction of ways we can touch the future in the present; a task that will be engaged in more thoroughly in the next chapter.

noted earlier. Moreover, it means that those still living need not go through the process of mourning the complete absence of the one who has died. I appreciate the appeal of such an understanding but cannot, in light of Herbert's considerations and my own affirmation of embodiment, agree with it. Herbert's argument is convincing insofar as it exposes the mind-body dualism that is at the heart of such perspectives. It expects the deceased to be conscious and communicative but in a fragmented and incomplete manner. The disembodied "aspect" of the deceased is expected to await the reunification with their body in order to once again experience the "network of relationships they left behind". This is the kind of delayed promise that has been so rightly criticised by feminist theologians, and is neither a relational, embodied future nor one that can help us to practise an appreciation of bodies in the present, as my following chapter will propose. The most that such a perspective can communicate is an incomplete kind of relationship; even if the deceased were able to relate in a disembodied manner this would be insufficient and ineffectual, as critiques of a disembodied God have argued. There would be no possibility of intimate and tangible relations with such entities, thus there would be no authentic relations. Although we can hold onto a hope in the ultimate and final reunification with those who have died, then, we should not consider them to be existing at present on some disembodied plane but rather to be authentically and completely lacking existence, lacking life, until they are embraced within and caressed by God's touch which works in partnership with them to birth them anew to their own embodied dynamism.

Ivone Gebara contends that such desires for parallel "heavenly" existences of loved ones are borne out of a lack of adequate language offered by the Christian tradition in situations of death and loss. Whilst the perspective explored above may be comforting, as noted, Gebara suggests that imagining the concurrent existence of the deceased alongside the living projects pain and suffering onto "divinities and a discourse full of

abstract and ahistorical concepts" (2010, 61). As such, she continues, any suffering that remains after the departure of a loved one is silenced. "There is", Gebara writes, "a rupture of language in the midst of continued suffering" (2010, 61). Thus, whilst the notion of a parallel heavenly realm may provide comfort, and as such should not be underestimated or hastily dismissed, it must be acknowledged that such a model does not ultimately help with confronting and truly feeling the reality of death(s) in this life. Instead, an eschatology typified by God's empathetic and vast embrace of embodied experiences is one that makes space and time for the reality of death to be experienced in all of its pain and sorrow. Such an eschaton calls us to authentically experience the integrity of life in the present by fully feeling the reality of death.

Whilst sorrowful, this is certainly not hopeless for amidst the very real and often difficult processes of mourning the cessation of bodies and relationships we can call on our remembrances and trust in God's promise. This is the promise of embodied relational presence and response, and God's loyalty to seeing these fulfilled. Carol Christ, for example, suggests that God, being the most related and most sympathetic of beings, is able to ensure some futurity to creaturely existence. She contends that God's involvement with the world can be seen as imbuing the lives of creation with significance *both* in the present and in the future. Christ presents the divine memory in the following way:

> When the individual life ends, it will become part of the divine love that is the ground of all being and becoming. The memory of our individual lives will be preserved by Goddess/God […] In the memory of Goddess/God, every single individual in the universe will live forever (2003, 139).

Christ claims that faith in such remembrance overflows with hope for the individual, as it means that "[t]here is nothing in life or death that can separate us from the love of Goddess/God" (2003, 139; cf. Romans 8.39). She adds to this that individual eternity, or endurance, is also to be located in the remembrances of the living (2011b, 143). As such, connectedness with God is here coupled with connectedness with creation in

ways that enable both mourning and hoping for the endurance of those we love after they have died. Christ thus affirms both creature-to-creature relationships and creature-to-Creator relationships and adds to the latter that God's power is expressed in the eternal preservation of creaturely existence.

Whilst Christ's view is helpful in showing that future endurance is not necessarily averse to a relational God, her appeal to divine memory in order to construct this is problematic for it may, contrary to my intentions and indeed Christ's own intentions, compromise relationality. Although Christ envisions God as taking creation "back into her body at death", and thus understands there to be "a component of embodiment" to this remembrance (2011b, 145; cf. Keller, 2003b, 421), it seems to me that absorption into the body of God is too akin to assimilation. Whilst Christ may be proposing an organic return to the earth, which would cohere with the depictions of the world as God's body that were noted in Chapter One, it seems that individual identity, and with it cognisant, sentient, embodied relationality is ultimately abandoned. Suchocki's helps to further this critique, for although she similarly proposes a future where creation is remembered by and "taken into God" (1977, 300), she also notes a problem when this fails to account for the "experiencing subject" (1977, 302). She writes that:

> The retention of immediacy must result in a mutuality of immediacy between God and the occasion; the mutuality must indicate the sense in which the occasion participates in God's immediacy, even whilst retaining its own.

Retention in God, then, for Suchocki and for myself, must also mean retention of self. Notable here is the claim that creaturely endurance in God's memory *as a mere memory* is an insufficient model of God, creation, and the future.

Herbert provides further clarification here, and shows how notions of the memory of God may be rethought in more beneficial ways. He reads the memory of God as

pertaining to a love for and loyalty to those who no longer live.[127] Alongside recognising that "the deceased are dead, with no implication of a disembodied spirit enduring the death of the body" he claims that there exists the assurance that "the dead are by no means 'lost' but are safely preserved *in* God, by God's faithfulness and power alone" (2006, 125). Because of God's commitment to embracing all of creation, expressed eschatologically in terms of God's desire for relationships with all of creation, God will not forget any members of creation in the future. This adds further substance to our practice of a hopeful mourning, as although we must be reconciled with the inaccessibility and genuine cessation of the lives of those we love, we nevertheless realise that this is not conclusive. We may mourn the end of existences in all of their totality, both embodied and spiritual, but we can also hope and trust in God's love for and loyalty to creation in order to assert that their existences will not only be brought back to life but will be enabled to live in a way that abounds with dynamism.[128] Along these lines, the resurrected body that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15.44 can be interpreted not as a fleshless body but as "our own resurrected, perfectly embodied, transcendent, fluid and eternal selves" (Haws, 2007, 194).[129] To reiterate my earlier claim, these are bodies that are *thoroughly* material as they are the same bodies they always were, and *radically* material as they are more than they once were. Thus, whilst such mourning may be more difficult and less comforting in the immediate than belief in a heaven that runs parallel to our earthly existences, it is nevertheless the only way of mourning that sufficiently affirms embodied relationships and existences.

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[127] This adds another dimension to the love and loyalty of God which has underpinned much of my thesis thus far.

[128] Again, this is not God affecting such an existence in a domineering and independent manner but rather in a relational and co-operative manner, as Chapter Two proposed.

[129] Despite many readings that would frame Paul as dichotomising the body and soul, Isherwood and Stuart observe that Paul's attitude toward the body is, in fact, ambiguous. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 15.44, with its discussion of "physical" and "spiritual" bodies, can be read, they claim, as contrasting flesh and spirit, as opposed to body and soul. The flesh is here understood as communicating "the human being (body and soul) in its fallen state" (1998, 62). This suggests that the "spiritual" body of which Paul speaks can be understood to consist of "the human being (body and soul)" in its redeemed state.

Although death is a real and often pervasive and painful aspect of present existences, then, the future's emphasis on embodied *life* can make us again consider ways in which we may flourish, even in the midst of death. Letty Russell offers an understanding of flourishing as being partly manifest in self-love, and she helps us to consider how the cultivation of such love can assist us in mourning the loss of others.[130] She suggests that we may hope not only *for* the loved one, that is, for their future eschatological existence, but also one may hope for *oneself*, as "the loss of one still leaves whole persons to move forward on a new journey" (1979a, 41-42). Hunt (1994, 131) articulates a similar perspective which further perceives the importance of developing self-love, particularly in the context of loss and mourning. She notes that such experiences illustrate:

> why befriending ourselves – loving our bodies, enjoying our work, finding ways to relax and reflect alone – is so very important. Then we can see the loss of friends for what it is – a severe and disconcerting experience but one that we will survive.

This is not to say that isolation should be sought to prevent the experience of loss, but rather that we should strive to locate our love, worth and value *both* in ourselves and alongside others so that when these others are no longer present, whilst we may be depleted, dispirited, and despondent, we will not ultimately be defeated. Given the magnitude and sorrowfulness of the losses that prefix mourning, such survival may seem far too alien and distant. Indeed, in some cases it may never be actualised. However, I earlier claimed that the fact that some sufferings are not overcome in this life only intensifies the power of the eschaton. Even in the struggle to survive loss we can maintain hope: we can glance at our mourning, our pain, and our suffering from the perspective of a future where both those for whom we mourn and the pains we experience in this mourning are transformed. This transformation is effected both by the reunion with those we have lost and the change of (theirs and our) pain into

[130] This attentiveness to self-love informs my next chapter's focus on self-love as one way to embody the eschaton in the present.

embodied existences that abound with dynamism. In the present, then, we can allow ourselves the grace of space and time to experience mourning in its fullness, whilst being heartened by a belief that those we have lost, and the relational and emotional aspects of ourselves that we have both lost and become in the light of such losses will not, ultimately, be lost in the future.

The Newness of Eschatological Bodies

These considerations can cause us, albeit cautiously and considerately, to articulate an eschatology that contradicts deaths, not merely by abolishing them but by creatively transforming them into lives that abound with dynamic experiences of embodiment. Moltmann (1996, 336) articulates this particularly eloquently, as he writes:

> The fullness of God is the rapturous fullness of divine life; a life that communicates itself with inexhaustible creativity; an overbrimming life that makes what is dead and withered live; a life from which everything that lives receives its vital energies and its zest for living.

Such a perspective posits the life of God and the life we receive from relationships with God as the overwhelming reality and totality of creation's existences. This is not to say that the realities of death are discounted; they continue to be experienced in the here and now, as noted, and are not, as Jantzen rightly observes, anything to be ignored (2009, 48). We can recall Jantzen's focus on natality here, and develop this by noting that natality is decidedly ethical for Jantzen as its perspective stretches beyond our own individual lives and out to "a love of the world and the lives of those to come" (1998, 152). By focussing on natality rather than mortality Jantzen succeeds in presenting an ethical calling to all of creation, for we all experience being birthed and thus "we are all natals" (Jantzen, 2009, 8), however varied our experiences of this may be. Reading this through an eschatological lens can lead us to claim that God cannot, ultimately, allow death to obtain; instead God helps us to make experiences of life an eschatological and ethical reality.

Although we remember that Jantzen herself claims that natality is not only about women's experiences of birthing (cf. 2009, 8), it is nevertheless beneficial to consider this eschatological and ethical calling to life in the contexts of life-giving experiences of birthing and mothering.[131] Re-readings and reconstructions of Mary help us to think more about this. Speaking particularly of Latin American women's perspectives on Mary, Elina Vuola notes that Mary is understood to exist in a liminal space between the commonplace and the divine; both an ordinary woman and divine figure. Vuola (2002, 177) explains that:

> For a woman in labour, Mary is, on the one hand, a sister or mother with the same experience, and on the other hand, a divine figure whom one can ask for help in one of the most difficult situations in a woman's life. Mary can help even in birth pains. Thus, in women's everyday experience Mary shares and confirms but also transcends their experience.

By placing emphasis on Mary's ordinariness, then, Latin American perspectives such as those noted by Vuola draw attention away from classical constructions of Mary as pure and virginal and rather focus on her involvement and empathy with the realities of some women's experiences of their bodies. This adds further credence to the earlier-noted reconstructions of God as one who is intimately involved in the world, and it adds substance to Jantzen's construction of natality for it makes the commitment to and involvement in life central.

Natality also emphasises the creation of something novel. This novelty is integral to the rethinking and reconstruction of an eschatology that is embodied and, crucially, that makes our varied embodiments more than they presently are. Jantzen names natality as "the possibility of fresh starts, new and creative approaches that can subvert violence and destruction" (Jantzen, 2009, 48). The particular violence and destruction that such an emphasis on natality and novelty can subvert, if read through an eschatological lens, is the patriarchal desire to construct eschatology as the final

[131] Of course, life-giving is not synonymous with birthing; contrasting experiences of birthing and mothering have here been acknowledged.

obliteration of embodied fluidity. Accordingly, eschatological finality can be rethought of as an end that begins new experiences of newness. This "beginningness", as Moltmann calls it, is far from static. It is not simply the "eternalization" of present lives, as Moltmann rightly notes that this would mean that "nothing new could be expected of eternity" (2004b, 152; cf. 154). I add to this that such an "eternalization" would also fail to address and transform the suffering and decay that so permeate life as it is presently experienced. In addition to this focus on the meaning of novelty for *creation*, we can assert that novelty is an essential part of God's being. As I posited earlier, God only fully becomes who God is when creation reaches its completion in new and dynamic lives in the future. In a similar vein, Suchocki invites us to consider the idea that an openness to newness communicates something of *God's* nature. She writes that "God is both the condition and the outcome of creativity, the provider and the recipient of novelty, because of God's genuine openness toward actuality" (1988, 99). God both inspires and receives creative newness, then, because God is genuinely open to creatures being able to have and express novelty and actuality.

For an understanding of eschatology, this allows us to consider a final point in time where engagements with and enactments of novelty are drawn into new forms of expression and are enabled to flourish. Flourishing, for Jantzen, is rooted in this life, in the affirmation of earthly, everyday existence, and in the struggle to abolish injustice in the here and now (1998, 168-9). Graham calls this an "absorption into 'life in all its fullness'" (2009a, 10). Moreover, the symbolic of "flourishing" is used by Jantzen to refer to an active, interconnected, and dynamic process of transformation (1998, 160-1). If, again, we read this through an eschatological lens, we can envision a future wherein death will no longer pose a threat to the dynamic endurance of life. What is more, this eschatological emphasis on life, far from distracting from Jantzen's reading of flourishing being rooted in this life, can return us to this life and encourage us to

engage in relationships of interconnectivity which strive to embody the flourishing future we anticipate.

Such a reading of flourishing again touches on the necessity of reclaiming the value of the earth body in the eschatological future. Indeed, Jantzen notes the versatility of the phrase as she writes that flourishing for humans can denote prosperity and good health, and in nature can mean to blossom or thrive (1998, 160). Affirming the body of the earth is significant not only in and of itself, but also because of the connections that have been made between the earth body and female bodies. Dorothy Soelle, for example, appeals to the Bible in order to substantiate a vision of the future that is decidedly earth-affirming. One way in which she achieves this is by interpreting the reference in Matthew 6.10 to the Kingdom of God in such a way that envisions an eschatological "new earth", not as a destruction or escape from this earth, as we have seen many feminist theologians critique, but as a restoration of this earth. Soelle argues that the Kingdom of God, whilst only fully manifest in the eschatological future, is brought to and affirms the present when relationships between all of creation are just, loving, and void of abuse (1993, 33). Halkes confirms Soelle's contention, writing that the end can actually be envisioned as "the end of the culture of violence" (1991, 160) and so can actually be a beneficial vision for the earth. Letty Russell also proposes a beneficial reading of the "new creation" which is decidedly eschatological. She claims that we are to live with a vision that "one day God will fulfil the unity of the church and mend the creation that has been so torn apart" (1974, 59). Each of these perspectives shows that the eschatological future can legitimately consist of the restoration and mending of the earth, as opposed to its destruction or desertion.

Moreover, the eschatological existence of the earth and the rest of creation seem inextricably connected. In a further development of the notion of flourishing, Grey

notes that flourishing "links person or creature with environment" (1999, 402), thus signalling the concurrent affirmation of human bodies and the earth body. We can see this exemplified in Isaiah 65.1-16, which DeBorst reads as proclaiming that "The land of death is now able to offer rest and sustain the life of animals and people! The relationships shattered by sin are mended by God's recreative hand" (2010, 46).[132] The earth is, in this way, a mirror to the rest of creation: the transformation of the earth is synonymous with the transformation of the rest of creation. Again, we detect an emphasis on relationality and connectedness. Following on from my previous chapter's assertion of the necessity of embodiment for this relationality, we see here further evidence of an embodied future. God creates new life out of the old creation by enabling all to experience a thoroughly embodied and relational eschaton, typified by sustained lives and mended relationships.[133] This can call us now to feel with the earth and honour its place in the divine embrace.[134]

[132] DeBorst highlights specific verses within this passage that highlight God's commitment to both the people and the earth. Isaiah 65.1-2, for instance, speaks of God being "ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me", and of God holding out God's hands "all day long to a rebellious people". DeBorst further refers to verse 10, which claims that "the Valley of Achor [shall become] a place for herds to lie down, for my people who have sought me", and verse 16 which reads: "whoever invokes a blessing in the land shall bless by the God of faithfulness, and whoever takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of faithfulness; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my sight".

[133] This is, to be sure, as much for non-human animals as it is for human animals; we recall the prophetic vision in Isaiah 11.6-9 wherein the "wolf shall live with the lamb", and multitudes of other animals who no longer cause destruction to one another but rather share in the fullness of the knowledge of God.

[134] Such an assertion can draw us closer to considering the significance of tactility, as thinkers such as Pavey, Vanier, and Wirzba emphasise the tactile nature of such an embodied relationship with the earth. Pavey, for instance, offers a unique re-reading of Exodus 3.5, interpreting God's command to Moses to remove his sandals not as a prohibition or warning, but rather as an invitation "to touch with our skin what God has touched, created, moulded" (2013, 6). Vanier adds further substance to Pavey's claims by positing that each *person* is "holy ground", and that "each one is part of a common humanity" (1997, 60). Furthermore, Wirzba claims that God's tactile relationship with the earth, as evident in Psalm 65.9-10 with its emphasis on ecological abundance at the hands of God, should similarly define our relationship with the earth, "for in this touch we participate in the ongoing creative and sustaining work of the Creator" (2008, 236-237). Thus, a reclamation of the earth body in the eschatological future can further nourish our moves to embody tangible and tactile relationships of love in the present, as will be developed in the next chapter.

I add to this that the passages pertaining to the eschatological transformation and endurance of the earth provide us with such illuminating images of the new creation, that if we are to draw parallels between the earth's future and the rest of creation's future then we have a very hopeful vision indeed. There certainly exists, within the tradition, substantial and explicit references to an eschatological future that is earthly and, what is more, that is *abundant* in its earthliness. Both Jantzen (2009, 143) and Grey (2000, 50) note the fecundity and splendour that typifies the flourishing of creation in Isaiah 35.1-2. The passage reads: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing". Jantzen interprets passages such as this in terms of flourishing, which she uses to further revalue both female bodies and the earth body (2009, 210). Indeed, reclaiming the fluidity of a flourishing earth as an integral part of eschatological existence signifies one way in which the revaluation of feminised traits can bear fruit for the rest of creation. That this eschatological fulfilment is expressed in the language of earthiness should not be interpreted as some metaphorical allusion used to describe human flourishing alone, though. Rather we should, with Carol Christ, read such associations to mean that "all of nature is included in God's salvation and that other than human forms of life have some degree of feeling" (2003, 29). The transformation of the earth body, like creaturely bodies, is thus integral to the realisation and specific nature of the eschatological future.

Moreover, exploring the specific nature of the earth's future existence can further assist us in considering the endurance of change in that future. Such blossoming and pure joyfulness that is depicted in Isaiah 35.1-2 is far removed from a static, changeless future. Rather, what this and other passages (such as Isaiah 55.12 and Amos 5.24) detail is a harmonious tumultuousness; to reverse Catherine Keller's assertion, a "turbulence within stability" (cf. Keller, 2003a, 215). Far from this being a

reproduction of patriarchal appraisals of stability, stability here is found in the *enduring* life of the earth just as much as turbulence in found the enduring *life* of the earth. The earth continues in the eschatological future but does so in such a way that is even more dynamic and abundant than it presently is. Again, this is understood to be indicative of the "Kingdom" of God, which Moltmann describes as "the reciprocal interpenetration of God and world" (2004a, 158), by which he means that God emerges from the very depths, even from the "womb", of the earth in order to dwell within the earth (Moltmann, 2010, 79). In so doing, the infinite God permeates the finite creation in a way that enables the fulfilment of that creation as it becomes able to contain the infinite (cf. Keller, 2003a, 81-82). The whole earth shall then truly become full of God's glory (cf. Isaiah 6.3) because of this "*finitum capax infiniti* – a finitude that embraces infinity" (Moltmann, 1999b, 41). Finitude is retained, in terms of the transitional processes and dynamic experiences of embodied life, but it becomes permeated with infinity in such a way that these processes and experiences may endure forever and no longer be hindered by their ultimate cessation.

## Conclusion

An eschatology that is characterised by experiences of dynamic and deathless embodiment, in the way that I have here attempted to argue, has the ability to affirm the complexity of experiences of embodiment, even if that self-same complexity makes a comprehensive account of these experiences ultimately elusive. Nevertheless, the partiality I have operated within *does* lend itself to aspects of specificity in which we can both ground and direct our hope. Attentiveness to past sufferings and the overcoming of some sufferings has propelled my imaginings into the future, exploring what an ultimate transformation of suffering and death may look like. The retention of bodies and their corollary of change is a tricky, though essential, aspect of eschatological existences, and their simultaneous endurance, transformation, and

fulfilment is what I have sought to specify here. That this relates to creaturely bodies but also to the earth body is an important aspect to remember. Not only does this affirm the interconnectivity that has been central to my thesis, but it also embeds the changing processes of life in tangible experiences. As Grey (2003, 212) so eloquently writes:

> This is our yearning, our hope: that the earth's woundedness will be over and together we shall know each other in a flowing world where our yearnings are realized in truth, peace and love. Only then will we awaken to a deeper yearning, and know ourselves held and cherished by the desire of God.

Whilst Grey may here be speaking of a more fixed state than myself, we can nevertheless use her assertions to consider the "flowing world" of the future as one of endless realisation. This means experiencing relationality that is always able to be fulfilled, potentiality that is always able to be met, and bodiliness that is ever-dynamic and ultimately full of life.[135] Moreover, existing as bodies who are fully in relation with one another and with God within this dynamically changing eschatological future suggests bodies that are open to and in touch with their own and each other's embodiments. Each of these facets underpins my next chapter's examination of the relationship of those reconstructions of the eschatological future to our lives in the present.

Indeed, these explorations, imaginings, and affirmations would be pointless and would merely perpetuate the problems with classical understandings if they were to settle with reconstructing only the process and content of the eschatological future. We must also speak of how such futurist visions can inform experiences of embodiment. This is not simply the future speaking to the present though. Rather, it is the completion

[135] This could potentially be read as a future which is perpetually *unfulfilled*, as bodies that continually change could be said to be bodies that continually become more than they were, thus meaning that eschatology inevitably contains elements of loss. However, such change has here been presented as occurring within the divine embrace of a God who does not forget or discard any members of creation thus meaning that bodies, in all of their shifting and changing, are enabled in the eschaton to retain what they once were whilst continuously becoming abundant in their embodiments.

(though not closure) of the methodological cycle which begins with revaluing traits aligned with female bodies for the concern of all bodies, uses that revaluation to benefit all experiences of embodiment, and explores how this revaluation can help us all to live in ways that shape both the present and the future. Thus, I now direct my focus toward the ways in which an eschatology that is characterised by bodies that experience the full freedom of relationality and dynamic change may return to present experiences. In so doing, I will explain that such an eschatology can help us to consider ways of living *now*.

## 4. A Tactile Time[136]

### Introduction

This chapter honours feminist theologians' attentiveness to the present and continues my own affirmation of present experiences by considering how a relational and dynamic embodied eschatology can be both created and anticipated in the present. The reconstructions of eschatology that were developed in the previous chapters enable me now to speak of the future as a tactile time. That is, a time where bodies are in touch with themselves and one another in the fullness of relational, embodied freedom and also a time that can be touched in the present. This means that tactile relationships can be both signifiers of the eschaton and the eschaton itself made present in the flesh, here and now. Quite fittingly, then, I will propose that the practice of touch can facilitate such touching of the future.[137] In this way, I claim that the future can not only inform our actions in the present, but that the future itself can also be shaped and created by those actions. [138] Whilst this chapter aligns itself with much of feminist theology's locatedness in the present, such reflections are here enabled by reading *from* and *for* the future.

It is important to note here that this is not a work in applied theology: my earlier constructions are not merely speaking *to* practice. More specifically, I do not simply

[136] Elements from this chapter also feature, in a significantly revised form, in my forthcoming publication "Touching the Future" in *The International Journal of Public Theology.*

[137] I propose the practice of touch as *one* way in which we may create and anticipate the future; this does not exclude other practices nor does it present those who are capable and desiring of touch as more worthy or able of being included in the eschaton. What it does suggest, however, is that there are benefits in both offering and receiving "good" touch, in ways that can both be informed by and can help to create the eschaton.

[138] Again, my reference to creation shaping and creating the future is not intended to infer that any such actions are necessary to inclusion in the eschaton. Nor should it be read as being indicative of varying degrees of worth or effectiveness in realising or experiencing the eschatological future. I have already presented a case for the universality and totality of inclusion in the eschaton, and we remember that an important addition to this was Pailin's critique of the contributory notion of value or "norm of worth" in light of the experiences of "severely handicapped people" (1992, 96). Accordingly, I qualify my claims here and throughout my thesis by noting that it is our experiences that are paramount in shaping God and the eschaton. We remember Chapter Two's claim that our actions and choices also shape the eschaton, and they matter, but that they do not demarcate varying levels of worth or worthiness.

impose an eschatological framework on to the practice of touch. Instead, the eschatological values of embodied relationality and fluidity are understood to be capable of being brought together, and indeed embodied, in the practice of touch. Neither is this a work in practical or pastoral theology: the practices explored here are not directive or prescriptive, nor do they begin with "problems of action" (Hermans, 2014, 124). Indeed, Hermans provides a clear distinction between theology that is practical (or, in Hermans' language, "practice-oriented") and theology that is theoretical (2014, 124). He writes that:

> Practice-oriented research starts with problems of action (decision making; discernment; re-constructing one's life story; knowing how to communicate experiences in the name of God) rather than theory […] A theoretical problem arises from a theoretical issue such as being unable to describe or explain some phenomenon in terms of the actual theory. The goal of this research is to expand our theory.

Having begun my thesis by expressing my dissatisfaction with theories of eschatology, and working in previous chapters to address this, this chapter seeks to present a conceptual or theoretical understanding of the practice of touch in light of these problems and constructions. It certainly, though, considers practicality as it seeks to be feasible and realistic, and beneficial to living well in the present.

This chapter, then, will firstly offer an examination of the meaning of touch, both for others and for oneself. Underpinning this will be an affirmation of erotic power which draws together Chapter Two's efforts to locate power in relationality, and Chapter Three's appraisals of embodied lives. An eschatology that is realised through relational power which draws us into experiences of dynamically embodied lives can be both created and anticipated in the present through tangibly feeling and embracing our own and each other's bodies. I will then move on to negotiate some of the ways in which touch can function as both a sign and an embodiment of the eschaton. Here, I will explore the capacity of touch to communicate the eschatological valuation of bodies; to create and nurture the kind of dynamic embodiments that typify eschatological life; and

to hope for bodies in response to difficult experiences of touch. Connected to this latter point is an exploration of the feasibility and possibility of tactile practices of forgiveness and mourning. By speaking of the eschaton as a tactile time, then, I aim to show that the eschatological future can be touched in the present by bodies touching in the present.

## A Liveable Future

### Practice and the Eschaton

My previous chapters have contributed to challenging some problematic elements of traditional eschatology by reconstructing the eschatological process as one in which creation is both involved and assisted, and the eschatological content as characterised by the transformation of embodied sufferings. These claims have never been severed from present life experiences, but have instead been responsive to them. Still, a more comprehensive assessment of the utility of such claims in the here and now is necessary. Such specificity is crucial; as noted in Chapter One, Isasi-Díaz (2004b, 56) writes:

> Making our preferred future a reality needs much more than vague generalities. Latinas' *proyecto histórico* has to be specific enough for each of us to know how we are to participate in the struggle to make it a reality, and what our task will be when it becomes a reality.

Interestingly, although the future that Isasi-Díaz speaks of here is not necessarily eschatological, Keller helps us to see that Isasi-Díaz's perspective is actually *more* loyal to the origins of eschatological thought than traditional models appear to be. Alongside Isasi-Díaz's caution against being "co-opted by the status quo" (2004b, 55-56) that was noted in Chapter One, it is possible to detect in her emphasis on praxis a definite challenge to the status quo, for she refuses to sit idly by and await liberation, and instead calls for active and pragmatic work to realise that liberation now. This is characteristic of eschatology, Keller claims, for "Eschatology in general is distinguished by its indignation in the face of injustice, that is, its prophetic critique of the status quo"

(1996a, 20). Indeed, Isasi-Díaz claims that the struggle is not to be contrasted with utopic imaginings for at heart utopia communicates both a "condemnation of the existing order" and a "forecast of a different order of things" (2004a, 344). Whilst, as we have seen, eschatology has certainly not always served this purpose, its proclamation of a different reality has and can again serve to challenge forces and structures that oppress, marginalise, and devalue. Thus there is a correlation to be found here between liberationist proposals of praxis and my own eschatological concerns; the two can and should be concerned with one another. To be sure, Isasi-Díaz's claims are relevant to my own as they highlight that any vision of the future must contain within it the tools to make that vision a reality in order to prevent it from becoming a pacifying tool of oppression. This chapter, then, will cohere with Chapter Two's claim that creation *is* involved in the eschatological process by specifying *how our experiences and actions* can shape the process and content of the eschaton. Tactile relationality will emerge as being central to this, in such a way that is both informed by and develops the claims made in Chapter Two.

Furthermore, this chapter coheres with Chapter Three by outlining the centrality of embodiment in this task, and the ways in which our bodies can be both signs and embodiments of eschatological life. Indeed, Elaine Graham (2009b, 83) explains that practical theology must attend to experiences of embodiment, for:

> a practical theology that tells stories of embodiment can really examine what it might mean for God to be revealed in a human *body*, broken and suffering, whose resurrection proclaims that love is stronger than death.

This is precisely the God for whom I have argued; that is, a God who authentically and concretely *feels* with humanity whilst helping humanity into embodied experiences of perpetual and dynamic vitality. Examining the practical ways in which our bodies can create and anticipate the eschatological future can thus further reveal what it means for God, and for us, to so honour and cherish our bodies. This is not, however, a suggestion

that the eschaton can be fully realised now. The eschaton differs from the present, in ways presented in the previous chapter, and we require God's final help to universally and fully experience this, as Chapter Two argued. As such, and given the nature of my reconstructions, the eschaton holds the power not to delay liberation or pacify creation, but rather to inform and direct our practices in a way that is infused with hope. Thus, whilst our attempts to cultivate certain practices in the here and now may fail or flounder, they are both worth the effort and a prophetic sign of the future.

Touch and the Eschaton

It is appropriate that the discussions in this chapter hinge on an exploration of touch, for touch bears the capacity to call eschatology out of its lofty, inaccessible future and make it tangible in and amongst our bodies. A focus on touch is further substantiated by an eschaton that is characterised by God's embodied perceptions of the experiences of creation, and by God's tactile responses to them. Furthermore, it emerges from the fulfilment of such embodied relationality, wherein embodied processes abound with dynamism. When combined, these two proposals suggest that both the relational process and the embodied content of the eschaton are *tactile*; comprised of touching (feeling) beings and beings who are touched (affected or changed). This can speak to and direct our moves to touch in the present, but the relationship between the present and the future is much more dialogical than this. The practice of tactility in the present can serve as a prophetic encounter which reveals something about, and can help to create, what the future will be. If present bodies are valued and can be used to rethink eschatology, then touch can be upheld as a significant aspect of our moves to create and anticipate the eschatological future. Touch is itself, in this way, eschatological; an assertion similarly upheld by F. Dean Lueking (1997, 337), who claims that:

> [Touch] points us to the future. The risen Lord's invitation to touch and see portends what is yet to come for our bodies. We long for that fulfilment, to embrace the Christ and those long gone from us.

By tangibly embracing our own and each other's bodies, we can thus participate in touching the body of Christ and participate in the body of God.[139] An eschatology where all draw near and are drawn into the fullness of relationship, in all of the material fluidity of their embodiments, is yet-to-be in fullness, but also radically intimate and tangible.

## The Meanings of Touch[140]

### Touch and Life

Further to these appraisals of touch, touch also has value and even necessity in our present lives. Cristina Traina has observed that "Evidence is growing that humans – especially children – have a physical, psychological, and spiritual need for a steady diet of touch" (2005, 6-7). Touch, then, is a developmental necessity (the complexities of which will shortly be explored) which can and should operate through and seek to cultivate relational embodiments. Indeed, without nurturing and nourishing touch in the early stages of a child's life, growth and development are simply not possible. Gupta and Schork add to this that touch may be crucial in developing a sense of embodied self-validation; that is, validation of one's own embodied self and one's bodily self-image. From studying the relationship between "perceived tactile nurturing during childhood" and body-dissatisfaction (Gupta and Schork, 1995, 185), Gupta and Schork have observed that "physical modes of nurturing, that is, nurturance by touching and hugging, are of importance in the development of body image, especially among females" (1995, 188). They go on to assert (1995, 188) that this:

[139] Eiesland and Vanier both name this participation in the body as freedom (Eiesland, 1994, 119; Vanier, 1999, 133), thus corroborating my claims in Chapter Two that the eschaton realises rather than compromises freedom.

[140] Touch may be defined as having both physical and spiritual elements; however, I suggest that feeling touched spiritually or emotionally *also affects* and is felt physically. As such I do not subscribe to a dualistic understanding of these dimensions of touch but rather speak of touching as always having both physical and psychological aspects.

> may be an indication that a certain amount of physical validation, such as that offered by touching and hugging, is necessary for the development of the healthy sense of the physical self or a healthy body image.

Lovingly touching the bodies of others, then, can cultivate both physical and emotional health and development. This has particular significance for women given the many ways in which the Christian tradition has devalued women's bodies; sentiments which have consistently been challenged throughout this thesis. An eschatological future that is characterised by the tangible divine caress and embrace of our embodied selves can encourage us to live as body-signs of such a future through lovingly touching one another. In so doing, we can literally flesh out our hope.

It is not only the case that touch is crucial to the development of life; even before this, we may claim that touch is crucial to the very creation of life. Wirzba even goes so far as to say that "touch is inseparable from life itself: no animal is deprived of touch without also being deprived of life" (2008, 232). Given my constructions of the eschaton as a process and place that is relationally embodied and dynamically full of life, touch must also be an integral aspect of our dynamically embodied futures.[141] A focus on touch here, then, is appropriate on the twofold and inseparable bases of life in the present and life in the eschaton. In further development of these claims, both F. Dean Lueking and Hugh Thomson Kerr make reference to Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* in order to highlight the significance of touch to creation (Dean Lueking, 1997, 337; Thomson Kerr, 1954, 1). Of course, the image referred to here casts two men in the starring roles, and so we must cast a feminist lens on this in order to challenge any allusions to normative masculinity. Mayra Rivera helps us do this as she re-imagines

[141] In light of this claim it may seem to be an oversight that touch was not a central focus of the previous chapter; however, time needed to be taken there to affirm bodily processes, as these have been the basis of the banishment of female bodies from eschatological existence. By constructing an eschatology that affirms these processes I am able, in this chapter, to explore how these embodiments can be felt and lived in the present in ways that both reflect and shape the future. Furthermore, tactility and tangibility was seen in Chapter Two to be a central feature of God's relationships with creation, thus adding explicit support for my focus here.

the original touch in the context of birth. Rivera claims that "*In the beginning was touch*" and that "Touch draws our attention to our beginning in the womb, awakening us to the memories of its primordial caress inscribed in the flesh" (2007, 89). Thus the original creative touch can be thought of not as the instantaneous and barely touching finger that (the male) God extends to Adam, but rather as the involved and intimate maternal touch that caresses life into being.[142] Such an understanding suggests we practise "touching one another into life" (Heyward, 1989, 135). Newness and vitality were seen to be integral aspects of the eschaton, and we can embody such a future now by reaching out to others in ways that birth new experiences of life. This life may be literal, or it may pertain to enlivened relationships. The practice of loving touch, then, can draw us all into a newness that is both a sign of the eschaton and a reality that can be lived now.

Touch and Female Bodies

We remember that female bodies have been characterised as more embodied, more material, than male bodies; attending to touch can assist in reclaiming the incontrovertible value of bodies as touch is necessarily embodied. It is a fleshy and material, rather than solely intellectual or symbolic act. We have seen how the prioritisation of the latter permeates the Christian tradition, and this has been to such a degree that the power of touch has often been denied. This is not surprising given the Christian tradition's consistent disavowal of anything associated with bodies and materiality. Carter Heyward has observed that traditionally, feeling has been paralleled with ignorance and has been deemed "an impediment to 'objectivity' and thus to knowing what is either true or good" (Heyward, 1989, 6). Similarly, arguments for

[142] Ann Grifalconi has re-imaged Michaelangelo's depiction in her piece *And God Created Woman in Her Own Image*, which appropriately features as the cover art for Carter Heyward's *Touching Our Strength* (1989). Less helpful, perhaps, is the transposition of the image such that the touch is still minimal; whilst providing a useful re-gendering of creative touch, then, a more involved and intimate touch is needed, as I attempt to articulate here.

God's intangibility pervade and invade the Christian tradition. We saw earlier how God's understanding of creation has commonly been constructed as immediate and complete; neither requiring nor being affected by relationships with creation. By presenting God as literally "out of touch" with the world, such views have claimed divine justification for either the disassociation of "feeling" from "knowing" or the discrediting of the kind of "knowing" that "feeling" enables. Lorde develops this by noting the gendered associations made between feeling (named by Lorde as *eros*) and femininity and the subsequent vilification of both (1984, 53). Thus, tactility has been constructed as antithetical to divinity through its association with materiality and, accordingly, with the female body.[143]

Sara Wuthnow adds further substance to these claims concerning a marked suspicion of touch within the tradition, and notes how the early Christian church initially recognised the power of touch, but in so doing sought to restrict this power to those it deemed worthy of possessing such power. Being at the bottom of the hierarchical "chain of command", Wuthnow observes, meant that women and the body were excluded from the practice of touch in such a way that the practice of touch became restricted to church leaders and "focussed upon spiritual rather than physical healing" (1997, 223). The power of touch was, however, "too pervasive to be subdued" and Wuthnow observes the central role that women played and continue to play in reclaiming and practising touch (1997, 223). It is thus appropriate to speak of tactility as a means of revaluing bodies generally and female bodies specifically, for touch has long been employed as a tool of subversion by women but has been overlooked, devalued, and controlled by a patriarchal system which sought to quell the presence and practices of female bodies. Such powerful practises of tactility must be given space

[143] Even some who wish to affirm the power of touch nevertheless conclude that "there is no getting away from the fact that we cannot touch God" (Pavey, 2013, 5; cf. Wirzba, 2008, 241). This seems to overlook the radical tactility of Jesus, which will shortly be explored.

to speak, and it is crucial to partake in the moves (however tentative or marginalised they may, to this point, have been) toward reclaiming and revaluing both embodied relations and tactility.

Touch is still more relevant and appropriate as a way by which to revalue bodies in ways that harmonise with my moves thus far, as it also bears the capacity to challenge and reunite the previously dichotomised and gendered categories of the body and the mind, and the physical and the spiritual. Feeling touched spiritually or emotionally can be understood to be inseparable from the physical location in and on which this occurs. The physical dimension of touch is thus presented as more than just the transmitter of the cognisant or intellectual; it is also the *only* location we have for what is felt and known. As such I do not subscribe to a dualistic understanding of these dimensions of touch but rather speak of touching as always having both physical and psychological aspects. Touch, then, can unite what the Christian tradition has often severed; the intellectual and the emotional, the spiritual and the material, the male and the female and the future and the present. Touch, here, is a fleshy and thoroughly embodied language which can communicate the eschatological valuation of bodies. The practice of touch can reclaim and re-sanctify that which has been gendered and subsequently delegitimised under patriarchal theological constructs of eschatology. It can be extracted from its patriarchal construction as a spiritualised practice belonging to men alone by claiming it as a physical, embodied practice for all of creation. In short, to use Nelson's eloquent phrasing, we can live as "body words of love" (1992, 52) by making this reparation a tangible reality.

## The Functions of Touch

### Communicating the Affirmation of Bodies

Attending to touch is thus an appropriate and meaningful way in which to consider living the eschaton. Touch can, for instance, be understood as a way of reaching out to the other in a loving affirmation of their existence which makes present the eschatological affirmation of bodies. In order to consider this in more depth, we may firstly explore the suggestion that touch has the ability to teach or communicate. We saw a moment ago how the Christian tradition has denied or sought to control this power, particularly in relation to female bodies. The abstraction of the power of touch from bodies, and the rejection of the power of such touch in creating wisdom or knowledge is, however, challenged by knowledge itself. Holler, explaining the developments within neurological research and evolutionary biology, asserts that "cognition emerges in the totality that is the lived body" (2002, 61). We know, then, *because* we feel, and our knowledge of the world and of each other can only increase when we learn to be in touch with such feeling. Similarly, we can claim that such embodied engagements with sentience and tactility are also the ways in which God comes to know. Indeed, in Chapter Two I argued that God must be relational in order to know creation. This framing of knowledge benefited from Grace Jantzen's interpretation of God's knowledge as understanding rather than data-retrieval; such understanding was deemed to be enabled by God's tangible and intimate relationships with creation.

God knows, then, because God is *touched* by creation (Jantzen, 1984a, 83). This touching occurs when we touch one another; our touching can be empowering or abusive (as will later be explored), and God feels the effects of both. It is clear that God intends the former, though, and this is no more evident than in the stories of Jesus touching and being touched. Rather than subscribing to the typical vilification of Thomas as the great "doubter", for example, we may see him as one with the courage to take up the invitation to touch. Epperly describes Thomas as "a model for faithful

wrestling with the mysteries of the resurrection life" (2001, 218). Amy Hunter expounds this by claiming that Thomas was one who had the courage to come out about his doubt, born of a desire to understand the resurrected Jesus (2002, 17). Whilst Hunter suggests this doubt was quashed upon merely *seeing* Jesus' hands, John 20.25 relays Thomas's desire to touch, with 20.27 displaying Jesus' openness to such touch. This suggests that Jesus understood the power of touch in communicating understanding and, ultimately, faith. It also recalls Morris's assertion that these actions of Jesus signal a God who understands and relates to creation in a tangible and personal manner (see Morris, 2008, 152-153). We find yet more useful models when we again look to the woman in Mark 5.25-34, whose courageous touching of Jesus resulted in the cessation of her bleeding and the elimination of her disease. In this passage, we read that upon touching Jesus' clothes, the woman "immediately […] felt in her body that she was healed of her disease" and that with a similar immediacy, Jesus felt "that power had gone forth from him" (Mark 5.29-30). This example also shows how touch enables power to be shared and not owned, even by Jesus. God's universal receptiveness and responsiveness to touch, as manifest in these two examples and, indeed, throughout Jesus' ministry, signals to us a radical vision of an embodied eschatology, whereby those who are hurting, far from being "untouchable", are invited to touch the very flesh of God.

This vision and this practice is radical, for it has the capacity to draw us close to the marginalised and excluded in a way that both makes the eschatological embrace of bodies tangible and adds character to the nature of that embrace. Morris (2008, 103) develops this by highlighting the transformative nature of such touch. He writes that:

> To touch certain disabled persons would have meant that Jesus himself would have become ritually impure and outcast […] and would remain so until he was 'purified' again. However, each person he comes into contact with becomes part of society once more and by touching them it is they who become 'pure' rather than Jesus becoming 'impure', it is they who are included rather than Jesus becoming excluded.

Jesus' touch can here be seen as not only including the marginalised but also as effectively and powerfully touching their lives in a transformative manner. The sharing of power that Jesus practises serves to transform the lives of the marginalised, and this can signal to us a way in which we too can use the power of touch in order to make the full eschatological embrace of bodies graspable. Indeed, Thomson Kerr explains that such touching assists our understanding of the redemptive love of God (1954, 2), and this is evident in Nancy Eiesland's relaying of her own experiences of such touch. Whilst having experienced improper or inappropriate touch, Eiesland also speaks of being present at a meeting wherein a group of nuns touched her body with care in such a way that "Their touch and tears were the body practices of inclusion". She goes on to name this experience as being one of "physical redemption" whereby her body was redeemed for God" (1994, 116).[144] Again, then, we see the power of physical touch in communicating God's tangible and intimate embrace and welcome of all.

Envisioning the eschaton as a place of the full experience of this embodied embrace means that we can be heartened in our moves to practise such touch now. Indeed, Vanier alludes to there being an eschatological dimension to such inclusive, embracing touch. Commenting on Jesus washing his disciples' feet, Vanier detects a particular significance in the inference that Judas would have been present in this group. Vanier is certainly not equating Judas with disabled persons, but rather seeking to highlight that Jesus' embodied act of tactility here shows that "nothing on earth is so unworthy it cannot be included in the kingdom of love" (1988, 48). Touch, then, can signify inclusion into the universal embrace of God, which may also consist of forgiveness (as in the case of Judas, and as will be explored later on in this chapter), but which is

[144] This is all the more significant given Morris's observations that "In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, God cannot be seen or touched because he is holy. That which is holy has become untouchable just as those who, at the opposite extreme, have become untouchable" (2008, 153). This also speaks to the necessity of reconfiguring God as one who is relational in a tangible, intimate manner, as Chapter Two proposed.

primarily about embracing all bodies, and especially those whom society may deem "unworthy". Fuelled by the conviction that all "are held in the arms of God" (Vanier, 1999, 124), our touching can thus be understood as being immensely meaningful. We can craft our own hands into the very hands of God as we touch those God welcomes and embraces, both now and fully in the eschaton.

In light of this, it can be claimed that touch provides us with the power to embody both the realisation and the particular content of the eschaton in such a way that offers specific and practical affirmations of bodies. We remember that in Chapter Two power was located in relationality and as such was understood to be true only insomuch as it is *shared* between God and creation. According to Carter Heyward, this is the essence of eros: the *sensual* sharing of power in which we "see, hear, touch, smell, and taste the divine" as we strive to cultivate empowering relationships (1989, 94). We are most powerful when we are sensuously engaged in this process of cultivating relationships, and our moves to achieve this can indicate our power to embody the eschaton. In addition to this, erotic touch empowers us to join with others in this task and thereby effect genuine change.[145] This passion for action, for "acutely and fully" feeling what we do, typifies Audre Lorde's reading of eros (1984, 54) and is fostered by being "in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves" (Lorde, 1984, 58). This, she claims, can "give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world" (1984, 59). Thus there is a need to develop a practice of being in touch with others and ourselves in order to embody eros and, I add, a relationally embodied eschaton. Whilst Heyward and Lorde, like many others I have engaged with, direct their attention primarily to present concerns, Friedman and Irwin (1990, 397) propose that eros necessarily looks forward. They claim that:

[145] It is important to note that "erotic touch" is not simply sexual touch but encompasses all intimate, relational touching, for as Friedman and Irwin note, eros is not "limited to – or even necessarily connected with – genital sexuality" (1990, 404).

> eros teaches persons to rebel against oppressive structures and life-denying values; at the same time, it helps them discover new values and modes of relationship to replace the old.

These "new values and modes of relationship" can be informed by the eschaton I have constructed as it speaks of a novel, transformed existence. Touch is, then, a practice which embodies erotic power and in so doing helps creation to share not only the struggles and joys of present life but also the task and hope of realising eschatological life.

Further to this, Audre Lorde notes the etymology of *eros*, asserting that it communicates "the personification of love in all its aspects – born of Chaos, and personifying creative power and harmony". It is for this reason that Lorde claims *eros* fills us with the power to live lives which embody a "creative energy empowered" (1984, 55). Carter Heyward adds to this that the erotic "is our most fully embodied experience of the love of God" (1989, 99). The intensity and efficacy of literally feeling our own and each other's embodiments can thus affirm the very bodies that we are by engaging their sensuality and embracing their tactility. Tactile, erotic power is thus a power that creates and connects rather than a power that dominates and destroys; in this way, it images the relational God I argued for in Chapter Two. Heyward names this connection as a power that calls us "into our most fully human possibilities, more deeply into the joy we know ourselves capable of when we are in touch with who we are created to be" (1993, 232). It is, in short, the power to be ourselves which, as we have seen, can be said to typify the relational freedom of eschatological life.

Given this understanding of touch as embodying erotic power, we can also affirm with Heyward that "sensuality is a foundation for our authority" (1989, 93) and thus reaffirm the communicative power of touch. We have seen how touch can communicate and make present God's embrace of all bodies, and I now add to this that

our understanding of others can be achieved through this sensuality, this touch. The eschatological affirmation of bodies can, in this way, encourage us to live as beings who are thoroughly embedded in our embodiments. Moreover, we can see such embeddedness as being alive with meaning and intent insomuch as it holds the power to make manifest the future and embody the very nature of the future that it touches. By touching and being touched we learn to be *in touch* with our own and each other's bodies, and in so doing make manifest God's eschatological intentions for fully intimate and embodied relations. In addition to cultivating our understanding of others, touch can also help us to communicate this understanding; to reveal to the other that they are understood. Touch can therefore be practised as a way of reaching out to others in an empathetic affirmation of their existences. In reaching out and touching the bodies of others we are able to communicate a sense of community, that is, both a shared existence now and a shared future existence. This is communal, for the shared existence we experience in the eschaton is not merely co-existence, but is a dynamically relational existence typified by diversity. Moreover, the erotic power by which this is realised is passionate and engaged with others; it feels the pains and joys of others through tangibly sharing them. As such, understanding others and communicating that understanding through touch creates erotic power which embodies in the present the existences that we anticipate and similarly create in the future.

Thus, alongside being empathetic, touch can also be prophetic; it can say to the other that their existence is meaningful both now and in the future. An eschaton that is characterised by a simultaneous endurance and transformation of embodied existences can call us to feel another's pain by acknowledging its reality and its impact on identity whilst also embodying a hope for the impermanence of such pain. Moreover, by sharing in joy we can touch the anticipation of an unmitigated experience of bodily dynamism. We remember Elizabeth Johnson's assertion that God's glory is manifest in

women being fully alive, and that such aliveness anticipates the full experience of that glory (2002, 15). A tactile acknowledgement of one another's embodied existences can thus also image and communicate God's glory as it will be fully realised in the eschaton. Moreover, relating to others in such a way has the ability to make the relational God both tangible and present to the other, for we remember that God encounters temporal beings in order to impart empathy to us; a sense that our experiences are both understood and shared. In reaching out to the other we not only show that *we* empathise with them but also that *God* empathises with them. This prophetic empathy can be enabled by a touch which is erotic; that is, a touch which relationally shares in and feels the experiences of others.

Embracing Different Bodies[146]

Still, touch is undoubtedly a complex practice, not only because of its capacity to be abused (as shall later be explored) but even prior to this, it calls us to ask questions of how we relate to others. As Traina (2005, 25) notes:

> When I touch, I must ask not only […] 'Is my touch good for the human race?' and 'Is my touch good for me?' but also 'How will the other receive my touch?' and 'is my touch good for the other and for our relationship?'

There is clearly a dynamic and multifaceted interplay between one's relationships with oneself and one's relationship with others here: we can practise a touch that is "good for the other" and good for ourselves in our relationships with others. In so doing, such touching can therefore be indicative of eschatological fullness of relationality. The notion of embrace again emerges as beneficial here; that is, embrace understood as a tactile openness to relations with other embodied beings. Such embrace can make manifest a relational affirmation of the enduring worth of all bodies which both images the eschaton and helps to create it. I earlier proposed a model of divine relationality

[146] The ways in which touch can function in our relationships with *others* is woven throughout this chapter and is therefore not limited to this section alone. Still, it is helpful to spend time here negotiating some of the complexities of tactile relations with diverse others.

which embraces both space and intimacy in ways which are respectful to and transformative for creation. Practising a tactile embrace can help us to touch and be in touch with the space around and within us, and so signal and add character to the final eschatological embrace of God.

This tactile embrace should pertain to much more than tolerance and inclusion, both of which can be used to suggest admission or assimilation into systems or structures that remain oppressive. Volf similarly notes that the practice of inclusion often and paradoxically relies on a more subtle practice of *exclusion*, whereby "taking in" merely seeks to neutralise the difference of the other (1996, 62-63). The language of embrace, on the other hand, has the ability to communicate both welcome and alterity as it speaks of creating spaces that simultaneously invite others and differentiates oneself from others. This challenges exclusion (Volf, 1996, 92) whilst claiming that "the alterity of the other may not be neutralized by merging both into an undifferentiated 'we'" (Volf, 1996, 144). Embrace can thus be understood as making space for the bodies of others. The divine embrace was earlier deemed to be wide enough to provide space for particular experiences and, in some cases, particular choices. This is, then, made more specific here as we touch the space around ourselves and others in moves to honour particularity and alterity.

Embrace can certainly and also, though, be conceived of as a tactile touching of the bodies of others, as we may embrace others through reaching out and touching them. Likewise, Volf notes that an aspect of embracing others is opening one's arms and reaching out for the other (1996, 141). Moreover, this tactile embrace can certainly cultivate the dynamic life that is typical of the eschaton by providing a concrete affirmation of the other's embodied existence, in all of its alterity to our own. Indeed, a welcome appreciation of difference is necessary if this embrace is to reflect God's

eschatological welcome. That such appreciation is often lacking highlights the very real need for eschatology to speak to the present. Commenting on the liturgical and practical overlooking of the "multiplicity of the Body of Christ", Cornwall (2010, 41) writes that:

> Female sexuality, non-maleness, and all modes of bodily excess or ambiguity are often diminished, and the bodies in which they exist are often not deemed suitable to minister to the rest of the community.

Such perceptions, Cornwall continues, disregard the complexity of both God and creation. In response, she claims that a monolithic image of God is, in reality, "less of a God than is possible", given the particular natures of vastly diverse creaturely embodiments (2010, 43). Similarly, an eschatological future consisting of God's open embrace and affirmation of all bodies, in all of their difference and particularity, can inspire us now to try to foster communities that reflect and create such a future. We remember Letty Russell's claim that such diversity is indicative of God's creative purposes to create a world that overflows with difference (2009, 53). An authentic and celebratory appreciation of such difference can inspire us to seek such communities in the here and now. Russell goes on to say that such a belief in God's intentions can encourage us to appreciate and celebrate difference as a gift, which can then propel us to nurture and develop diverse communities (2009, 106). The cultivation of eschatological life in the present thus requires the tactile creation of spaces in which bodies are embraced and helped to both exist and flourish in all of their alterity and difference to our own bodies.

A key aspect of this "making space" is the confidence to allow the other to be a being that we do not know. That we relate as embodied beings means that we must recognise that there is always a hidden, inaccessible dimension which means that *complete* understanding of others is impossible. Although touch can generate and mediate understanding, then, this is not an understanding that continually demands to possess

all knowledge about the other. However, making space for the difference and partial unknowability of others in such a way should not mean exoticising or etherealizing them beyond all recognition, for this can be just as problematic as vilifying or denigrating the different bodies of others. Min writes that placing too much emphasis on difference obliterates the other "by elevating and etherealizing the other beyond all history in thought" (2004, 14). Whilst there must be a sense of alterity this should not be absolute, as this would only foster an attitude of distance: a sense in which we are most welcoming to the other when we do not know the other (cf. Bennington, 2000, 113). Although the otherness of the other should prevent us from ever possessing or assimilating them (cf. Volf, 1996, 143), it should not result in our resignation to the deficiency of knowledge we have about them. Rather, this knowledge can encourage us to strive to know.[147] What we are called to practise, then, is wonder in the face of the other. Irigaray is helpful here as she suggests that marvelling at the alterity of the other, far from making our attempts to move towards them futile, can actually propel such movements. She writes that "Wonder is the motivating force behind mobility in all its dimensions" (1993a, 73). This suggests that an awareness of the alterity of the other can compel us to move towards them; to seek to relate with them. Wonder, for Irigaray, is the surprise of the other; she claims that they "should *surprise* us, again and again, appear to us as *new, very different* from what we knew or what we thought he or she should be" (1993a, 74).[148] Thus, wonder revels in the space it creates to be surprised at the ever-emerging, ever-changing other. Such dynamism was seen to typify eschatological life, and this can here help us to see with Irigaray that such an existence means that other bodies are endlessly insurmountable and also endlessly

[147] This approach coheres with my perspective on speaking with specificity about the eschaton, as I have claimed that speech and action concerning the eschaton is made possible by the experiences of our present lives. Resignation to agnosticism thus meets a twofold challenge here; both with regard to the eschaton and to the bodies that will exist therein.

[148] Quite fittingly for this discussion, relating to the other in wonder contains elements of surprise and newness; two features I claim are also present in the eschaton insofar as God's relational knowledge means that God can be surprised by our actions and existences, and also that dynamic novelty typifies our experiences of our bodies in the eschaton.

discoverable. We can wonder at their complexity and alterity and such wonder can propel our desire to relate to them, for as Irigaray writes, wonder pertains to "the appetite for knowledge of who or what awakens our appetite" (1993a, 78; cf. 1996, 104). In actively and tangibly making spaces for the differences of others, then, we can embody an eschatology that embraces such difference without seeking to own or obliterate it.[149]

Alongside this understanding of embrace as making space for difference and distance, such embrace also has the potential to make manifest the *celebratory participation* in such difference. It is not only that we should embrace difference but also that we should *share* spaces where we are all welcomed in such an embrace and find ourselves equally embraced. There should, again, also be an awareness of connectedness or sharedness. This does not mean uniformity: though similarities may reveal areas of connectedness, they should not be the conditions for it. Granted, the recognition of similar embodiments may highlight to us reasons for connecting and relating. This should not, however, be deemed to be indicative of all connectedness; such a stance could potentially exclude differently embodied persons. Rather, the basis of connectedness should be our shared future; that is, a sense that each and every one of our particular embodiments will be honoured and present in the eschaton.[150] Jantzen (1998, 149) is helpful here, as she suggests that an affirmation of particularity and diversity signifies the dynamism and vitality of unity, as she writes:

> The sameness which we share is in part the fact that we are not the same; we are all unique, singular, irreplaceable. And that uniqueness occurs not in isolation from others, but is from the beginning contained in a web of relationships and in a shared world.

[149] This distancing, this making space for the other, will inform this chapter's later considerations of how we may challenge abuses of touch.
[150] This *sharedness* also prevents making *one* embodiment paradigmatic of eschatological embrace.

Although my starting point is *eschatological* and Jantzen's is clearly *protological*, we share a conviction that the simultaneous appreciation of difference and similarity is the essence of embodied relationality and the connectedness established therein. This means, then, that we embrace the other not because we perceive them to be like us; such a perspective is mere solipsism and centralises one's own existence, making it the yardstick by which the conditions for embracing the other are formulated. Instead, we can engage in a tactile embrace of the other on the basis of solidarity; a conviction that we *can* share one another's experiences in the here and now (whilst appreciating that these experiences are different) in a spirit of empathy, and that we *will* share the same future (where our differences and particularities are retained and celebrated). This is, in short, a shared celebration of all of our differences, both now and in the future.

Our starting point is decidedly eschatological, then; recognising our sharedness and moving from this to practise and cultivate communities of such sharedness. Heyward, (though, like Jantzen, does not propose an eschatological vision), makes a similar point as she claims that relationality does not begin with differentiating ourselves from one another but rather in appreciating our connectedness, from which we are able to "recognize and value our difference" (1989, 13; cf. 21). Thus, in moving from trust in our shared experience of the eschatological embrace of particularity we are able to connect with one another in a solidarity that makes space for the different bodies and experiences of others. Thinking back to the reformulations of power in Chapter Two and this chapter's note on the meaning and significance of eros for touch, the very nature of the eschaton emerges here as being indicative of erotic power. This is made manifest through shared experiences in the present which is enabled through the tactile embrace of others.

It should be noted that such talk of openness and welcome, especially when expressed in relation to bodies, and women's bodies in particular, has a problematic history and therefore potentially dangerous results. The welcome embrace of bodies can and has been articulated in terms of hospitality, or as embodying the status of "host", and this has been deemed to be the domain of women. Aristarkhova observes that "The connection between femininity and hospitality is indeed often assumed as 'natural' and 'given' and presented as such in many traditions and texts" (2012, 168; cf. Volf, 1996, 25-26; Diprose, 2009, 150). Women's bodies have, in this way, been constructed as consummate and willing hosts to the bodies of others. An emphasis on embracing the bodies of others cannot continue in this vein. It should not be used to infer that the practice of embodying welcome is the task of women alone. Nor should it be used to promote the literal, maternal embrace of bodies as being indicative of femininity.[151] Such attitudes construct women's bodies as existing *for others*, rather than for the flourishing and appreciation of and for women themselves (cf. Moulaison, 2007, 359). Still, some, such as Derrida and Levinas, have suggested that this welcome interpreted as hospitality is *rightly* understood in such a selfless manner. Derrida argues that hospitality should be entirely for the other, with the host making no demands and constructing no conditions for this hospitality (Derrida, 2000, 7); whereas Levinas speaks of being obedient to the demands of the other and, ultimately, being dominated by their exteriority to oneself (Levinas, 1969, 290). However, the eschatological affirmation of bodies compels us to resist such notions as they can surely only lead to the depletion of the body of the host. This is a body expended for the other to such a degree that one's own health, vitality, and identity are compromised; an outcome that is most definitely challenged by the eschatological model I have proposed. Coupled with the traditional association of women with such "hospitable" acts, the eschatological

[151] This is not to say that the ability of some women's bodies to physically embrace the bodies of others cannot be a helpful tool; it has emerged as such throughout this thesis and will continue to do so.

affirmation of bodies can propel us to challenge such damaging and dangerous interpretations of welcome and strive for ones that not only embrace the bodies of others but also and crucially help the individual to embrace their own embodiment.

Unhelpful readings of embrace and hospitality can further be challenged by again reconfiguring the maternal embrace not as a passive surrender to the other, but rather as an active opening up to the other, as Chapter Two similarly proposed. Thought through cautiously and mindfully, maternal embrace can help us to consider "making space" for another as an active choice that not only enables the embrace of others and one's own body, but does so in a way that cultivates the flourishing of all involved. Although, as in my previous chapter, I do not wish to normalise any one experience of women, the fact that many women *do* experience maternity means that we should appreciate it as a valuable aspect of embodied reality. Such embodied experiences provide a helpful (though, as emphasised, not exclusive) motif by which we can understand the embrace of bodies. This is also Aristarkhova's intention, as she reconstructs maternal relations to mean "requiring 'work' as a way of letting the other be, become, breathe" (2012, 175; cf. Bostic, 2002, 608). This reiterates the notion that embracing the bodies of others entails the active provision of space to let them be, in all of their difference and alterity. What this also has the power to communicate is the interconnectedness of flourishing and embrace: the embodied welcoming of other bodies not only makes space that lets the other be but creates the conditions that help the other to become. This mirrors the ever-changing and expanding body of God which continuously opens itself to welcoming new people (Vanier, 1988, 103); practising tactile embrace here not only expands the self but also enhances the self as one becomes comprised and celebratory of more and more life. Tactile embrace of the other can thus be envisioned as a practice which lovingly touches the other and which feels the need for space in that touching. This makes manifest the anticipation of an

eschaton which is relational and full of life and also adds shape to the very future we anticipate by effecting changes now which will endure in the eschaton.

Cultivating Love for Our Own Bodies[152]

Although these constructions can counteract suggestions that maternity is prefixed by or practised in passivity, we are still here speaking only of what the mother's body *gives to the other*. Hospitality as embrace must, then, be combined with the practice of mutuality if it is to reflect the eschatological affirmation of *all* bodies. In order to achieve this, it is crucial that we incorporate an affirmation of loving self-touch here. In order for embrace to be mutual and void of exploitation or depletion, the giving or making of space must be balanced with having a space of one's own (cf. Rivera, 2007, 97). Alongside feeling the other's need to have their own space, articulated here as the difference and alterity of the other, we *must* also affirm the self's own space. This is a space of self-love, and it is only when such self-love is appreciated as a legitimate and necessary pursuit *for women* that an image of maternal embrace can be utilised effectively. Contrary to patriarchal assumptions, women's bodies can thus emerge as worthy in, of, and for themselves. This also highlights the ability of bodies to cultivate and empower love in and for the other. Both forms of love are enabled by relationship with the divine and relationships with others; this is truly power-in-relation that not only reflects the nature of God but also realises the future that God intends for us.

Alongside this attentiveness to the tactile embrace of other bodies, it is important that self-love and self-touch are also affirmed on account of the self's connection to others

[152] As with the previous section, the role of touch in cultivating self-love will also resurface within this chapter as it emerges again as helpful and relevant to the discussion of abusive and hurtful touch.

and the proposed simultaneity of the practice of love and touch.[153] As Traina writes, "We need an approach that recognizes the confluence of self- and other-love and also makes us aware of our own capacities to misread and abuse these loves and their gods" (2005, 26).[154] Self-love and other-love are thus inextricably connected and must both be explored and affirmed. More than this, though, such affirmations are of particular import for a practice that is capable of benefiting women, as self-love and self-touch have suffered from scant attention at best, and vilification at worst in traditional thought. Carter Heyward communicates the reasons for her *loss* of attentiveness to her self, explaining that "The loss of my sense of self as an irreplaceable participant in the relational processes of creation and liberation was the effect of female socialization in hetero/sexist, racist, classist patriarchy" (1993, 55). There is, then, a necessity to promote the reclamation of senses of self and spaces where self-love can be cultivated particularly for women as this has been so abstracted from what is deemed appropriate.

We can see this with the models of eschatology that were critiqued in Chapter One; there, it was deemed that *loss* of self was required in order to enable women to partake in the eschaton. Similarly, Irigaray cautions against using such a framework to try and cultivate female self-love because, she claims, "The female has always served the self-love of man" and has been deemed to achieve her own self-love only through what she produces or elicits (1993a, 63). Irigaray perceives and appreciates the legacy that women must inherit (though not adopt): a legacy of servitude and abasement. We see such a legacy being experienced by many of the women in Slee's study (2004b, 100-101) for whom, Slee observes:

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[153] There are arguments to be acknowledged here that pertain to considerations of who is who in this love and how such love is possible. Irigaray is seminal here (see 1993a, 60) and I appreciate the significance of such questions. However, I am less concerned with logical and philosophical attempts at self-definition and more concerned with theological practicalities of fostering an appreciation of one's own embodied existence.

[154] Such abuses are thoroughly explored later on in this chapter.

> the loss of self was a result of, or another side of, the experience of giving oneself away to, being absorbed in, becoming excessively identified with and dependent upon the male other.

Indeed, Irigaray goes on to write that love has been created for and directed to "man, child, housework, cooking. Not by the woman herself *for herself*". This objectification of women, that is, the making of the woman as an object for man's own love, has meant that for women, "love of self is arrested in its development" (1993a, 70). This expenditure or denial of the female sex is played out in a thoroughly embodied manner: women's bodies have been constructed as mere mediators of male self-love. Accordingly, if women are to achieve a love of their own bodies, this must and can only be done by referring to and by being in touch with their own sex: it is within *and only* within a woman's own body that she can discover true self-love.[155]

Although Irigaray's observations are legitimate and convincing in their suggestions that we exercise caution in these considerations, what is missing in her work is any sense that God may exist as something *other than* the projection of the female sex, and thus possess characteristics or abilities that women do not have.[156] The omission is intentional: Irigaray mitigates any sense of the female sex's self-love being mediated through or for a male other by seeing the divine as an object of projection *from* the female sex. Bacon observes that Irigaray views the divine as "an object or instrument through which the self-love of the female is established" (2007, 230), and Irigaray claims that women must do this by mimicking the process by which men have achieved self-love in order to affirm their own self-love and "thwart" the patriarchal procurement of male self-love that has subordinated them (cf. Irigaray, 1985, 76). There may seem some correlation here with my own formulations; after all, I have

[155] This is not to say that Irigaray's approach is solipsistic: her thoughts on relationships with others are both ethically and philosophically beneficial and are, evidently, utilised throughout my response.

[156] My thinking here relates to considering God as a being who has the ability to *help* women realise *a particular type* of self-love, rather than the divine being a mere projection of the female sex, as Irigaray seems to suggest.

sought to imagine the future, and indeed the God who helps us to create and experience such a future, from the starting point of qualities identified with women's bodies. However, there exists a point of departure: where Irigaray proposes the construction of a transcendent horizon or divinity which is firmly rooted in female sexuality and subjectivity, I argue that more space is needed between God and creation lest the two become entirely fused and God become indistinguishable from creation. Given that I presented in Chapter Two a case for God being able to fully and finally help our attempts to realise the eschaton, it would be contradictory to fully subscribe to Irigaray's notion of a divine constructed solely from female subjectivity and sexuality.

Irigaray seems to suggest that such constructions are the only way that women can be at home in their bodies and therefore experience self-love. More helpful is a God who is not only imaged in relation to what it means for women to love themselves, but who is also able to equip and inform us as to how to cultivate such love and, crucially, to find us loveable and actively love us even when we struggle to love ourselves. Given my reconstruction of God as one who is intrinsically and intimately involved in relationships with creation, we may, then, conceive of God as tangibly caressing and encouraging the development of women's self-love, but doing so in a co-operative and personal manner. This moves beyond imagining a God who is constructed solely on the basis of female subjectivity and sexuality, but it does not regress into imagining God as the pinnacle of male sexuality. Rather, what is proposed here is a relational God who exists alongside women (and, indeed, all of creation), feels with them, and is intimately and helpfully involved in their attempts to lovingly be in touch with, and to lovingly touch, their own embodied selves.

Moreover, such a God is both able to enable our loving and is also genuinely touched by our loving. Such mutuality affirms the embodied cultivation of self-love by ascribing

divine purpose to it: claiming that God not only intends and assists the development of self-love, but also that God *feels loved* when this is achieved. This ties into suggestions that God loves us not *in spite* of our bodies but *in* our bodies, integral as they are to our very identities. Indeed, Nicola Slee writes that "God is to be known, worshipped and adored, not in spite of the body and sensual knowing but precisely in and through them" (2004c, 89), thus again highlighting the sensual nature of both knowing and relating. Sallie McFague articulates a similar perspective, questioning as she does whether "we want to be loved in spite of who we are or because of who we are?". McFague goes on to argue that there is little to sustain or encourage us in our own loving if we continue to believe that we are loved in spite of our present existence (1987, 133). Rather, we can utilise the divine and eschatological affirmation of our entire embodied selves in order to cultivate love for ourselves. Such affirmation can, McFague claims, be located in the metaphor of God as Lover. This, she argues (1987, 127), communicates mutuality in finding oneself and God to be *valuable.* She writes:

> Lovers love each other for no reason or beyond all reason; they find each other valuable just because the other person is who he or she is. Being found valuable in this way is the most complete affirmation possible. It says, I love you just because you are you, I delight in your presence, you are precious beyond all saying to me.[157]

The eschatological valuation of embodied existences, fuelled and assured as it is by *God* finding our embodied selves valuable, can thus propel us to accept God's love for ourselves and so touch our own love for ourselves. This is not to say that our self-love is *grounded in* something external to ourselves, but rather that the reasons for us to love ourselves are *illuminated* by a God who embraces the totality of our existences. Furthermore, this affirmation comes from a God whose transcendence is achieved not by being aloof, distant, and domineering but rather by being completely and intimately involved and touched by loving and being loved by embodied beings.

[157] Irigaray's notion of distance in such loving, articulated as wonder, offers an important dimension to considerations of such love, but is more appropriately discussed in the subsequent section of this chapter.

An eschatology that is typified by a fullness of who we are, in all of our embodied and relational complexities, can further support and inform the practice of self-love which can be achieved through self-touch. I use self-love here to refer to the appreciation and celebration of one's own materiality that can be made manifest through self-touch. This can be phrased as a belief that "The body is a self's ownmost place" (Keller, 1996a, 176), as argued in the previous chapter. This means refusing to see our bodies as something we possess but rather embracing them as the very essence of our being; asserting that "We *are* bodies", as opposed to claiming that "we *have* a body" (Moltmann-Wendel, 1994, 1).[158] We may even go so far as to say we are inherently "touching" bodies, as our selves touch the very bodies we are, embodied as they are. This is propelled by the conviction that these bodies are our forever-home, not our transient and temporary one.[159] There is a need, then, for us to effect a homecoming; a sense of being settled, content, and in touch with our own embodiments. This should not, however, be read as mere complacency. That the future we look to also contains within it an element of transformation means that our bodies will become more (though, we remember, not entirely *different*) than they presently are. As such, whilst we must be reconciled with our bodies and celebrate their sensuality and tactility, we must also negotiate the limitations with which we must presently live.

The limitations I refer to here are not those of traditional theological depictions of embodiment: it is not that we are *restricted by our bodies* and look to a future where *we are no longer embodied.* Instead, the limitations that I speak of are the embodied

[158] It should be noted that Moltmann-Wendel's affirmation of the inseparability of the self from the body is ambiguous; elsewhere in her text she maintains some sense of distinction between the self and the body, whether in terms of competing desires (1994, 3) or with reference to the self being located "in" the body (1994, 22, 30).

[159] This statement is made in contradistinction to Bouchard's assertion that "While earth is our cradle, it cannot be forever home" (as cited by Polkinghorne, 2002, 32), and in agreement with Isherwood's claim that "our Christological journey is home, to the fullness of our incarnation" (2010b, 21).

experiences of pain and suffering that limit our experiences of life. It is not enough to simply say such limitations will be absent in the future, for this does not assist us in living as limited bodies in the here and now. Rather, a future that transforms embodied pains into embodied lives of dynamism and abundance, as I argued in the previous chapter, can teach us to practise a loving touch of our bodies in ways that either protest against the causes of pain or, when this is not possible, struggle for survival within the experiences of pain. Both actions embody life, for the protest is *for* life and, recalling Isasi-Díaz, "the struggle is life" (1988, 99). Delores Williams, develops her emphasis on Jesus' life (as opposed to focussing primarily on his death), and sees Jesus as helping provide the conditions for this survival. She writes that black women's salvation is assured by "Jesus' life of resistance and by the survival strategies he used to help people survive" (1993, 164). Monica A. Coleman concurs and develops this, writing that "Salvation is not a divine imposition or a gift to creation. Salvation is also survival and quality of life, and it requires the co-operation of the world in which we live" (2008, 32). Again, there are allusions to the critique of an omnipotent God and an emphasis on human responsibility. This is connected here to a prioritisation of survival which is posited in concurrence with a desire, and indeed a need, for life. Struggling for survival, then, emerges as the primary concern for oppressed people. Pursuing life and creating conditions for liberation *in this life* are paramount. Such experiences comprise part of what it means to be embodied in the here and now and, as such, cannot be eradicated in the future; in fact, they affect the very shape of the future as they add character to the meaning of life.

Furthermore, they create new spaces for making manifest the eschaton for they embody the radical and subversive belief that the pain presently being experienced is destined to be transformed into life, in a way that can and should be made tangible in the present. Indeed, Slee (2004b, 106) observes that:

> Paradoxically, even images of deadness and lack of reality testify to an awareness of the need for a recovery of life and of feeling, and can generate a powerful longing for a more vital self.

Thus, expressing feelings of struggle and pain can signal a desire for transformation and for an alternative future, and a protest against the forces that quell and hinder this. We can see examples of such transformation in Susan Shooter's study of some of the ways in which survivors of abuse relate to God. Citing a woman named Lydia's sexual abuse by an uncle, we read that things "still hurt" for Lydia, but that "they hurt with [God] and not without him [*sic*.]" (2013, 225). Shooter writes that this shows how "struggle and pain are survived with God, transformed because of the active presence of the divine" (2013, 225). Here, loving self-touch can emerge as bearing the capacity to make manifest the transformative creativity of the eschaton and to cultivate hope for such an eschaton. Indeed, Audre Lorde calls for women to reclaim eros by touching "the power of the erotic within ourselves", and subsequently acting against oppression (1984, 58). Thus self-loving touch can not only generate protestations against oppression but it can, in itself, contradict oppressive forces that would tell bodies that they are undeserving of such loving tactility.

Transforming Bodies in Pain

There are two paradoxes to be noted in these explorations of touch, particularly regarding my references to the maternal body. Firstly, it is very often the case that the body who initially touches us into life is the body whose death touches us the most profoundly. May, for example, relays her experience of being with her dying mother; the mother whose body, "vibrant and vigorous, verbally and viscerally – was the first body I knew" but is now the body who embodies dying and, finally, death (1995, 13-14). Soothing and comforting touch can play a crucial role in such circumstances, even or especially when we are in the midst of grieving. In addition to practising what may be called "palliative touch", we can also consider ways in which touch can mediate and

facilitate the grieving process. Zach Thomas, in his article "The Intention of Touch in Pastoral Care", relays his experience as a hospital chaplain and how his practice of appropriate, considered touch allowed him to communicate his presence and generate calm for a mother who had lost her son. It was only by being with the woman in such a tangible way, Thomas notes, that such presence and calmness could be achieved (1999, 25). In the context of grief, then, touch can be communicative and comforting in ways that words may not be. Touch, here, has the power to comfort the grieving, to soothe the one who will eventually be grieved for, and to offer hope to both. This hope is the very revelation of the resurrection which, Epperly claims, reveals "the touch of God in the midst of pain and helplessness for persons, at all stages of life" (2001, 109). That God is with us in, truly feels, and can ultimately transform such sufferings in the eschaton means we can see them as important parts of our stories, but not the closing scene. That this transformation is finally and completely achieved in the eschaton means we can sit with the grieving, the (eventually) grieved-for, and our own grief, in ways that, though sorrowful, can be tinged with hope in the promise of a future full of embodied flourishing.

The other paradox to be noted is the fact that some tactile maternal bodies skirt the blurry boundaries between life and death by embodying the potentiality of both.[160] Traditional Christian theologies have framed this as a fearful union, as it has been understood to make explicit the boundaries and limitations of embodied life. Such a fear has found alleviation in traditional Christian models of eschatology, which have been depicted as a life without material limitations, enabled by re-birth through the Father God. Just as the protological creation has been accosted by images of the tentative and dispassionate male God touching Adam into life, so too has the

[160] Moreover, Molina notes that many women describe their experiences of becoming mothers as "facing death" (2013, 211). This is a death more akin to the death or loss of the woman's identity or control, which again highlights that "death has many faces" (DeBorst, 2010, 44).

eschatological creation been colonised by the image of a God who births us away from our bodies and from the material. This can be challenged and remedied by an embodied eschatology which both utilises and affirms the value of maternal bodies. By seeing maternal bodies as metaphors for eschatological life-giving, we can imagine the new creation to be realised through the intimate caress of our bodies; it is by this caress that we enter new life in the eschaton and realise such life in the present.

An embodied eschatology, wherein bodies flourish fully, is also beneficial when we are confronted with touch that *does not* produce or sustain life. Such an eschatology can fuel the conviction that abuses of touch are contrary to the experience of life that is God's desire and intention for creation. Traina (2005, 19; cf. Heyward, 1989, 97, 150) adds more specificity to this, providing as she does a comprehensive (though, of course, not exhaustive) list of such abuses:

> touch that inevitably produces harmful biological consequences; touch that damages or threatens to damage physically or harms emotionally within the syntax of a culture or its relational history; and touch that transgresses the limits of appropriate relationship especially between unequals.

It should be acknowledged that by referring to "unequals" Traina does not mean beings who are ontologically unequal but rather relational structures wherein power or authority are unequal, such as teachers and students or therapists and clients.[161] There are many circumstances where touch has been abused in the ways listed by Traina. That some of these have been in the Church itself, and have therein been of a particularly sexual nature, makes the necessity of an alternative theological perspective on sensuality and *eros* as experienced in touch even more crucial. By looking forward to abundant and dynamic embodied life in the eschaton, we can embody a challenge and resistance to abusive touch through the practice of "good touch" (Traina, 2005, 4). We can make manifest what touch *should not be*, help soothe the pains of touch that *has*

[161] Carter Heyward offers an examination of such constructions of power in her autobiographical text, *When Boundaries Betray Us: Beyond Illusions of What is Ethical in Therapy and Life* (1993). This text proves illuminating to this discussion, as will later be shown.

*been what it should not be,* and create new ways to touch that are empowering rather than destructive. This speaks a truth that is not-yet, but is nevertheless tangible in its hope that it will be. May expresses a similar perspective as she writes that such truth-telling means "bearing witness in one's body to the Good News – news always arriving from another shore – proclaiming what is is not what will be, affirming God is indeed the God of radical and risky reversals" (1995, 22). We can, then, speak and act against abusive touch, fuelled by the conviction that God loves these bodies that have been so touched, and intends an alternative future for those bodies.

This is a far from simple or instantaneous pursuit; Rivera, speaking in the context of maternal relations, notes the multiple and complex ways in which abuses of touch are experienced and internalised. Though the maternal relation can certainly be a site of hopeful and helpful meaning, as I have and will continue to argue, it can also be a site of woundedness. Rivera observes that abuses of touch are so often inscribed on the bodies of women to such a degree that the women's very skin manifests memories of "painful and guilt-ridden separation" (2007, 96). Rivera presents this with reference to Cherríe Moraga's work on racial conflict, noting that a mixed-race woman may feel distanced from her "brown mother" and thus be reminded of her "complicity with a racist society" (2007, 96). The suggestion here is that a patriarchal and racist society not only inscribes but also causes the internalisation of an embodied dis-ease. Distance and separation are, then, realistic and often painful dimensions of some women's experiences of both mothering and being mothered. Lovingly touching oneself resurfaces, and is framed here as a transformative process by which this woman in particular was able to caress her own multiplicity (Rivera, 2007, 97); able to be reconciled with her own complex and perhaps confusing embodiment.

It is because of this complexity and confusion that Rivera notes such touching often strives for a promise that is as yet unfulfilled (2007, 96). Touching here is prophetic, then; it anticipates the eschaton by embodying its incompleteness and fragmentary nature. Though partial, this does not mean the practice of touch here is futile; the generation of such touch both requires and can foster the development of self-love. A woman's body "lovingly touching itself" (Rivera, 2007, 97) can not only embody the eschatological affirmation of bodies but can do so in a way that radically contradicts the patriarchal defamation of non-conforming bodies. An eschatology comprised of embodied beings can encourage us to practise self-love through touching and being in touch with our own bodies, and so embody the very future that we anticipate. When such self-love is our aim we become more capable of loving others. May makes a similar realisation: "I am not really able to love others *unless* I love myself (…) If I withhold love from myself I withhold love from others" (1995, 48). This is not to say, however, that one must establish self-love prior to loving another; this is unhelpfully and worryingly too akin to the Thatcherite notion that "we need to create wealth ourselves before we can think of helping others" (Davis, 1997, 587). Such a sentiment, in the context of this discussion, implies that self-love must be established first, upon which one is then able to love others. Not only does this limit the scope of love itself, but also limits the individual's ability to love. As Ricoeur observes, this leads one to question "whether one must be one's own friend in order to be someone else's friend" (1992, 184). It is not, then, the case that we are *unable* to love others if we do not love ourselves, as the quotation from May perhaps infers, but rather that we are able to be most effective and authentic in our love of others when we learn to love ourselves. Slee notes the power of this, highlighting how some women in her study "were able to offer the self to the other in genuine connection because they had a real self to share" (2004b, 129). Thus, when we learn to love our bodies by practising loving self-touch,

we enable a connection with and an affirmation of not only our own bodies, but also the bodies of others as we become more open and able to love, and to lovingly touch, them.

However, even when touch is intended to be "good" and loving, it may not be experienced as such; there are some for whom the very tactility of relationality and intimacy that I seek to affirm are *intrinsically* fraught with fear and anxiety. Linda Holler relays the experiences of two women with autism, one of whom (Donna Williams) experienced the combination of touch and intersubjective relations as a form of "drowning, or being eaten, submerged into the other" (2002, 21). Touch, in this instance, is inappropriate and in fact hinders the realisation of eschatological life as it contributes to pain rather than anticipating its transformation. Rather, Holler explains that touch must function, in such cases, to enable a sense of "body ownership" (2002, 23). This was achieved by Williams by practising "sensory integration", which consisted of "rubbing her skin with brushes, trying to make connection to her torso" (Holler, 2002, 23). Again, Rivera's idea of female bodies lovingly touching themselves (2007, 97) emerges not only as an important dimension of touch, but also as, for some, the only appropriate way to touch. An eschatology that embraces particularity means that not only inter-creational relations but also internal relations can be sanctified. Such an eschaton can speak back to experiences such as Williams's and sanctify such self-loving touch. It can also encourage our moves to create this in the present in ways that add shape to the nature of the eschaton. The eschaton is, in this way, fleshed out as a place in which we can fully love our diversely embodied selves.

Whilst self-touch can, in this way, be a journey towards self-love, it can also be an obstruction to it. Self-touch can itself embody the abuse which has thus far only been aligned with others. Whilst the motivations for and manifestations of this are too vast to be afforded the explorations they deserve here, some assertions can be respectfully

woven with those already made. Jane Kilby (2001, 126) has explained some dimensions of self-abusive acts, one of which correlates with the already explored communicative power of touch. This power is complexified by self-abusive touch. With specific reference to self-cutting, Kilby observes that:

> the 'voice' of self-cut skin is an extreme substitute for language. Skin deliberately wounded and cut thus speaks violently of the failed promise of language to communicate trauma: it is a rupturing force that tears itself, and its significance, apart from language.

Self-abusive touch appears here as a form of apocalyptic apophasis: revealing that which is unspeakable.[162] Whereas "good" touch can communicate empathy and affirmation of embodied existences, self-abusive touch can use embodied existences to communicate the absence of empathy and affirmation. The body is here constructed as a voice for those who feel muted, and whilst this was earlier affirmed, the processes by which this is achieved in this context must, without pathologizing them, be questioned. It seems, for example, that the self-harming individual, whether consciously or not, sets up a distinction between their "self" and their "body", whereby their body becomes a communicator for the self rather than an equal and integrated aspect of the whole self. Although Kilby claims that touching oneself in ways such as self-cutting may embody a struggle and a will to survive, I again invite us to cast an eschatological eye on this. An eschatology that touches us into a new life which is void of pain and characterised by embodied vitality can encourage us to touch ourselves with love and care. This suggests that non-abusive self-touch is both a possibility and a reality. Whilst such an eschatology does not now eradicate the reasons for or manifestations of self-abusive touch, it can inform us that even in the midst of these troubled embodiments, we can retain and proclaim a different reality. Even when self-abusive touch may be felt to be the only way to be heard and loved, we can embody a prophetic hope that it will not ultimately be the only way. Not only this, though; we can also be encouraged by an

[162] This interpretation benefits from Catherine Keller's definition of apocalypse as "unveiling" (1996a, xii).

eschatology comprised of flourishing bodies to protest against whatever it is that causes us to touch our bodies in harmful ways, and so try to touch our bodies in more efficacious and life-affirming ways. Moreover, an eschatology of embodied relationality can encourage us to open ourselves to the loving, tender, and caressing touch of others, which can help to transform the pain that so often evokes the need to engage in harmful self-touch. This can draw us into experiencing the eschatological transformation of pain in the here and now, and it can help us to embody the anticipation of the full transformation of pain in the future.

A Tender Touch

Given that an embodied eschatology was earlier said to consist of both continuity and discontinuity, it is feasible to assert here that the marks of abusive touch will not be obliterated in the eschaton but rather will be experienced from the perspective of eschatologically transformed existences where they can no longer hurt. Recalling the previous chapter's claims, we may say that the pain that has been and currently is experienced is not denied in the eschaton, but it is no longer experienced as pain. In learning to lovingly touch those parts of us that presently hurt, and in allowing them to be carefully caressed by ourselves and by others, we take seriously and make a reality of this hope for resurrected life. We also honour the integrity and contingency of bodies in the eschaton, for we remember that such wounds have touched us deeply. This calls for our practice of touch to be as tender as it is hopeful. Heyward calls us to live authentically as people who believe in the power of touch and sensuality, and so practise "anointing one another's wounds as healers" (1989, 93). For Heyward, this is another key feature of "sharing this life together" (1989, 92); a practice which, I have claimed, typifies both the power of and our power to realise the eschaton. By practising the tenderly tactile care and caress of one another's wounds, we take seriously the often painful realities of experiences of embodiment. In so doing, we also live in ways

that signify our commitment to being truly present to the experiences of such pain and, crucially, embody the anticipation of the full transformation of such pain.

Although the experiences explored here are not exhaustive descriptions of problematic or abusive touching, we can use such considerations to emphasise the need to be sensitive and attuned to the ways in which touch has damaged others. Although touch certainly has the ability to communicate that '"I accept you' or 'I affirm you'", we must also recognise that the depths of the wounds caused by abuses of touch may make such touching painful, even terrifying (Traina, 2005, 11). As such, we may wish to appeal again to Irigaray in order to incorporate an element of *space* in our relating to one another. Irigaray (1996, 103) suggests that we exclaim "*I love to you*" rather than "I love you", and that recognition of the other on this basis:

> means or implies respecting you as other, accepting that I draw myself to a halt before you as before something insurmountable, a mystery, a freedom that will never be mine, a subjectivity that will never be mine, a mine that will never be mine.

For Irigaray, this means that the other can never be completely identified, accessed, or known. Fidelity to such recognition means respecting the other's borders and boundaries; the place at which their subjectivity and particularity requires space. A tactile response to this means being in touch with the need for such space, as was earlier proposed. Furthermore, such an attitude, understood in the context of this discussion, would recognise the particularity of the other's pain and never seek to possess it as one's own or to force an overcoming of the pain. Coupling this with Irigaray's earlier noted contention that inaccessibility need not be feared but rather can fuel our moves towards the other, we can combine this practice of respectful distance with a willingness to reach out to the other. This means reaching out to the other only if they desire to be reached, and if they do, only in ways that empower and affirm them.

This also, and again, highlights the need for understanding; Jantzen's proposal concerning the understanding of God resurfaces here and helps us to see that our knowledge of the other should be an "intimate personal knowledge" predicated by our "intimate sharing of […] joys and sorrows" (Jantzen, 1984a, 83). Such intimate understanding is itself tender, and tells us that our touching should be tender; that is, sensitive both to the feelings and experiences of the other and to our own responses to those feelings and experiences. This combination of mystery and understanding is expressed by one of the participants in Nicola Slee's study; Stella highlights the importance of "allowing myself…to be touched by that mystery" of the other person, and Slee also notes her emphasis on the significance of keeping "in touch with your own centre in order to maintain that commitment to others" (Slee, 2004b, 145). Thus, sensing and being sensitive to oneself resurfaces as essential not only to understanding one's tactile relationship with oneself, but also to understanding the tactile needs and desires of others.

However, understanding and perceiving such desires is, again, complex. In order that our touching not be abusive, it is crucial to explore how to perceive the correct time and place to touch. Audre Lorde asserts that "use [of feeling] without consent of the used is abuse", thus emphasising the need for touch to be attentive to the desires of the other (1984, 58). There are certain circumstances where this emphasis on consent is particularly relevant, such as relationships between "unequals", as earlier noted by Traina (2005, 19). In such situations, the negotiation of consent, if it is informed and void of manipulation, can protect the more vulnerable from being touched in ways that are harmful and abusive. However, we may wish to think more about the meaning of consent here, for there may be circumstances where touch is spontaneous: this lack of verbally negotiated consent does not necessarily mean that the touch is abusive. Indeed, Vanier notes that "in the world of friendship and relationship, gestures

normally precede the word. The word is there to confirm the gesture and give it its signification" (1999, 99). In light of this, I am wary of making spoken consent the base criteria for touch. I am also conscious of the unilateral relationship implied by such language; consent seems to suggest a structure where one who is more authoritative or powerful desires to touch one who is more vulnerable, with the latter's power being only in assenting to or refusing such touch. It is difficult to see how this is a mutual arrangement. Thus, whilst consent is an important aspect of touching, it is not the foundational condition for good touch, nor is it always the context for the *best* touch.

Alongside attending to consent, we should examine *intent.* Thomas makes a similar assertion, claiming that our embodied reactions to situations can help us perceive our own intent in touching, and whether such touching is appropriate in any given situation (1999, 26). Though Thomas provides some helpful suggestions for defining appropriate and proper intentionality in touching, I suggest we define this intent in terms of mutuality and, more specifically, mutual empowerment. Carter Heyward's work is indispensible in helping to clarify this point. Heyward has consistently been committed to valuing both mutuality and tactility and the dangers of fearing them. She illustrates, with a refreshing openness about her own experiences, how the commitment to rigid boundaries of "care" can actually serve to thwart that very commitment (1993, 113). When mutuality is desired and when intimacy is sought, the refusal to be open to touching and being touched by another is, itself, abusive. Heyward writes that "'abuse' is not simply a matter of touching people wrongly; it is also a failure to make right-relation, a refusal to touch people rightly" (1993, 10). Boundaries do not always prevent abuse and, as seen here, may even cause it. In seeking to do no harm, more harm is often done. Caution vetoes risk and abuse potentially ensues. Such harm is evident in Shooter's engagement with survivors of abuse; one of the respondents, Miriam, relays her experience of "ministers who use red

tape to keep people at arm's length" and how, for Miriam, this contradicted Jesus' intimate encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.7-30 (Shooter, 2013, 231). In situations where abuse has already been experienced, then, the "refusal to touch people rightly" only serves to further withhold intimacy and, thus, to perpetuate harm.

This may seem an over-simplified, even dangerous, appraisal of touch; given our awareness of abusive touch, we should certainly be sensitive here. Thomas similarly notes that "in a culture where touch has gone wrong and intentions are suspect" we are left with legitimate questions concerning whether we should touch at all (1999, 23). However, when intent is examined for its alignment with mutuality, our assessment of knowing how and when to touch can progress. Heyward (1993, 69) defines mutuality as:

> a way of being connected with one another in such a way that both, or all, of us are empowered – that is, spiritually called forth; emotionally *feel* able; politically *are* able to be ourselves at our best, as we can be when we are not blocked by structures and acts of violence and injustice or by attitudes and feelings of fear and hatred.

We may say, then, that alongside being a product of good touch, the criteria for negotiating touch relies on communicative relationships: both or all parties must desire to touch. In the very least, then, touch should be mutually consensual, but more than this it can, at its very best, be mutually *empowering*. When this occurs it provides a tangible foretaste of the life God intends for us and towards which God will fully draw us in the eschaton.

Just as self-love is cultivated alongside and also enables other-love, as previously noted, the challenges to abuses of touch compel us to think more about interconnectivity, specifically in terms of mutuality. Heyward's notion that touch should be concerned with fostering such mutuality is developed by her framing of this as erotic (which she

uses to mean an embodied, sexual, and sensual relationality). She reflects on the erotic as "our embodied yearning for mutuality" (1989, 3). "Good touch", then, seeks and nurtures mutuality. That which abuses is neither founded on nor is it able to develop mutually affirmative relationships. The relationality we perceive to be characteristic of creation's future is certainly mutual, and such an eschatological vision can challenge abuses of touch. Nevertheless, the sad reality that such abuses *do* presently exist means that moves to practise "good touch" are risky. As such, we must not only be sensitive and attuned to the ways in which touch has damaged others and/or ourselves, but we must also be willing to suffer the rejection or failure of our sensual moves towards the other. Indeed, Heyward later writes that touch is comprised of "not only reaching out to others but also allowing ourselves to be touched deeply by them" (1989, 100), and that such moves do not always work in the ways we intend them to (2010, 21). Though a realistic view of the present, Heyward's realism is conclusive as it is rooted in her conviction that mutuality is empowered by "a vulnerable and loving, but not omnipotent, God" (2010, 21). Whilst I similarly reject the notion of an omnipotent God, I have proposed a model of eschatology where God is *more* powerful than creation, insomuch as God is able finally to help creation to realise the eschaton. As such, an eschatological perspective that sees God as *both* vulnerable and loving *and* able to effect new and transformed existences for us means that we are helped in our risks at reaching out to the other.

Still, even when consent has been achieved, intent has been examined, and mutual empowerment is sought, our touching may still fail, be rejected, or even hurt. Nevertheless, our sensitive and considered moves to touch can be energized by the conviction that the other's and our own pains will be transformed by the God whose loving and empathetic touch cannot fail. This does not mean that we are at liberty to touch the other or ourselves without regard for the potential pain we may cause;

rather, it shows that such pain is felt by God and is challenged by its transformation in and through the divine touch which is wholly loving. When unsuccessful, the very least that our attempts to reach out to the other can do is provide anticipatory signs of such a future. When successful, though, healthy, loving, and appropriate touch can embody a revolutionary challenge to abuses of touch and a wonder-full realisation of a relationally embodied eschaton.

Hoping for Bodies that Hurt[163]

When the chance to offer such touch has passed us by though, such as when those who have experienced violent and abusive touch have died, we can again engage in the tactile creation of spaces that resist such violence. In this context, such "spacing" can help us to practise an embodied mourning, wherein immense suffering can be countered by an immense hope. This can, as Vento argues, call us to "continue to decry and mourn whatever is and has been that deviates from God's final future justice" (2002, 20). This justice is not punitive or retributive, as this can only ever foster resistance to the complete and final transformation of *all* into a relational and embodied existence. Rather, loving and relational justice calls us to resist structures and systems that create *both* oppressors and oppressed. Although our priority should be remembering and protesting the oppression and violence committed against the oppressed, by remembering God's open embrace we are prevented from reproducing that violence by redirecting it to the oppressors. Again, the proclamation of "never again" resurfaces, and illuminates our moves to make manifest the eschaton as we challenge the conditions that create and perpetuate suffering in all its forms.

Given the universally inclusive eschaton I have proposed, and the eschaton's formation by and utility for practising loving touch in the present, it may seem logical to assert

[163] This pertains both to bodies that have been hurt and bodies that have caused hurt.

that loving touch should similarly be shared amongst the abused and abusers. This is not, however, the case: such a claim could very easily perpetuate rather than remediate the abuse. It may be that physical distance is what is required in order for the abused to be able to cultivate self-love. This is exemplified by Reid (2007, 123), who cites the story of a woman's experience of the obligation and responsibility she felt to forgive her abusive partner:

> I believed I had to imitate Jesus' final act of love during his crucifixion. I worried that rather than feeling forgiveness, I might feel hatred in my heart [...] I feared that if I failed to forgive him completely before I died, then I might end up in hell myself.

This woman received a model of forgiveness which, far from releasing her from violence, immersed her further into it, as it placed forgiveness over and above her self-love. The belief that she should forgive her abuser, even in the midst of the abuse she was experiencing, enmeshed her in an impossible situation whereby she felt obliged to forgive, but could not, and so felt additional guilt on top of her suffering. When touch has been so destructive and abusive, the proposal that one should nevertheless seek to cultivate loving touch of the other is, here, inappropriate. Again, touching the space around others rather than directly touching others can emerge as an appropriate, and no less significant, realisation of the eschaton.

Moreover, whilst Jesus' forgiveness of others has been used in such a damaging way, Keene (1995, 128) offers an alternative reading and challenges the very attribution of forgiveness to Jesus in the crucifixion account. Jesus does not, Keene argues, forgive those causing his suffering:

> Instead he asks his Father, he asks God, to forgive them…This is the one place where, if Jesus wanted the weak to forgive the strong, he could have indicated it. He did not.

For those who have suffered from abusive touch, then, proposing a model whereby the abused practise forgiveness of their abuser(s) is not necessarily the most appropriate response; there may, indeed, be times when it is most beneficial for us not to forgive.

God's loving and respectful embrace in the eschaton means that such feelings and responses are given a gracious wide space to be experienced and appreciated. Given the model of God as a God who both feels with us and acts for us, though, we can hope and trust in God's love for and loyalty to all of creation even when we ourselves have been made unable to make this a reality.

Still, it may be feasible to claim that there are some situations where forgiveness is both possible and beneficial. It is crucial to note here that any forgiveness of abusive touch should not be confused with forgetting such actions and the subsequent hurt or pain experienced. As I have claimed throughout this thesis, eschatological existence consists of the remembrance of such pains even though they can no longer hurt us. Suchocki even goes so far as to assert that forgetting "has no place in the hard reality of forgiveness" (1995, 150). Forgiveness is necessarily preceded by hurt, by a lack of love, and often by a misuse or abuse of touch, so the reality of it is indeed hard. And yet, whilst the lack of love that precedes forgiveness certainly makes the practice of forgiveness difficult, forgiveness bears the capacity to embody a radical challenge to the abuses of touch that have been noted, and to make present, or at least anticipate, the eschatological embrace of all bodies in fulfilled relationships of love. Forgiveness should not be understood as inaction or non-resistance, nor should it be self-denial or self-negation. Likewise it is not to be confused with hatred or violence. Instead, it can be an acknowledgement of the reality of the hurt and abuse caused, but also a refusal to be tied to this hurt; a choice to let go of the immediacy of the pain in love both for the other and for oneself. Forgiveness is certainly as much for oneself as it is for the abuser. As Heyward explains, "[Forgiveness] has at least as much to do with the capacity of those who have been wounded to move forward as with those who have inflicted the injury" (1999, 183). Forgiveness practised through lovingly embracing the bodies of those who have hurt us, when this is appropriate, safe, and beneficial, can

thus be a sign of the eschatological embrace of bodies and the relational future which God intends for all. Similarly, though, when space is what is needed, this can be sought in the confidence that such spacing is also a sign of authentic relational embodiments, and is not a hindrance to God's unfailing love for all bodies.

This double-effect of forgiveness can release both oneself and the other to experience the process of relationality that typifies the realisation of the eschaton. As Peters explains: "The divine enemy is not destroyed but reconciled. Using forgiveness as a means of reconciliation is the divine agenda" (1994, 189). Although the forgiveness that one offers need not be accepted in order for one to experience a restored sense of self-love, there is certainly a hope for reciprocity to further add to the restorative process (cf. Keene, 1995, 131). Still, some may feel unable to forgive if reciprocity is absent, or if the hurt is too severe, as can be seen in the case of a woman who could not forgive her son's murderers: "In my life nothing, not a single thing, has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians…Therefore I cannot forgive" (as cited by Carmichael, 2003, 131). Where forgiveness is not possible, then, we can return to the earlier claim that we can place our trust and our hope in the God who is eternally and fully capable of loving others whilst never ignoring or diminishing the reality of suffering but instead transforming it through loving relationality.

## Conclusion

Negotiating and making space for the loving touch, of ourselves and of others, has here been constructed as being connected to creating the conditions for bodies to embody the eschaton. In addition to this, I have claimed that our moves to touch can be fuelled by the conviction that one another's and our own pains will be transformed by the God whose loving and empathetic touch cannot hurt, frighten, or fail. This means that our fumbling attempts at "good" touch can, in the very least, provide anticipatory signs of

the future. There is also potential, though, for healthy, loving, and appropriate touch to embody a revolutionary contradiction of abuses of touch and a wonder-full creation of future lifefulness. An embodied eschatology does not only say that bodies matter, then; it also offers specific ways to live this conviction. Furthermore, it sees female bodies as having the ability to communicate some elements of the specific nature of eschatological existence and some ways in which this existence can be lived now. Such an eschatology is hopeful and humble. It is hopeful for it imagines that a life full of fluidity and vitality *will* be. This gives content to our tactile practices, and infuses our touching with confidence. It is humble for it accepts that we are limited in our capacity to touch, that our attempts to practise good touch may be flawed, and that tactility is risky. This infuses our practice with trust that God's touch cannot fail, and that the risk is both worthwhile and prophetic. Ultimately, this hope and this trust can mean that the final sounding of the trumpet depicted in 1 Cor. 15.52 will be a fanfare of such magnitude that its reverberations touch our bodies into an abundance of dynamic life.

# Conclusion

## Introduction

My explorations in this thesis arose out of an engagement with and an examination of feminist theological challenges to traditional Christian constructions of eschatology in relation to characterisations of female bodies. This was presented as the starting point for my explorations on account of my desire to both engage with and contribute to the field of feminist theology. Traditional Christian constructions of eschatology were problematized by feminist theologians on account of their promotion of patriarchal notions of God, their androcentric constructions of creation, and their dislocation from lived realities. Such critiques appeared to be aligned with specific themes; namely the eschatological process, content, and time. It was detected that feminist theologians deemed traditional models of eschatology to present the process as one that is realised by an omnipotent God; the content as one modelled on masculinised ideals of a fleshless, static existence; and the time as being locked and isolated in the future. These notions were perceived to privilege qualities associated with male bodies, with female bodies being constructed as oppositional to divine and redeemed life. Feminist theologians exposed how women's bodies have, on the basis of such assignations, been excluded from and devalued by eschatology. Moves to remedy this were seen to revalue traits that have been aligned with women in order to highlight their presence in and meaning for all existences. Most prominent here were the traits of relationality, fluidity, and sensuality. In engaging with these responses, I detected both potentials and problems. I felt that their affirmation of previously marginalised and devalued qualities posed a much-needed and substantial challenge to damaging notions of eschatology. I also, however, felt that their focus on how these aspects were experienced predominantly in the present was ultimately limited in scope and hope. I argued that abandoning eschatology's sense of ultimacy and finality, whilst understandable, may not be the most beneficial option for feminist theology.

A primarily presentist stance was seen to present a limited hope, for embodied relationality, fluidity, and sensuality were never able to be experienced in their fullness. An alternative response was therefore deemed necessary; a response in which the concerns of feminist theologians could not only be affirmed but also used to significantly rethink eschatology. I thus sought to contribute a new perspective whereby traits associated with women's embodied existences emerged as inseparable from, abundant in, and revelatory of the eschatological future for all. Having used my previous chapters firstly to locate my thesis in the realm of feminist theology, and subsequently to present a new model of eschatology, this chapter will draw together various aspects of the reconstruction I have attempted to provide. Discussions of method, relationality, fluidity, and tactility will be woven together in relation both to specific chapters and to my thesis as a whole. Quite fittingly for the focus of this thesis, I will then move to thinking toward the future by outlining some implications of my thesis in order to anticipate some potential areas for further research.

## Rethinking Eschatology

### Method

The central goal of this thesis has been to construct a feminist theology of eschatological bodies. I have responded and added to feminist theological concerns by showing how reclaiming qualities that patriarchal theology has aligned with female bodies can enable a rethinking of the eschaton that benefits all of creation. In this way, I noted that I engaged in a form of strategic essentialism whereby I valued traits that have exclusively been associated with *female* bodies for the benefit of *all* bodies. This starting point informed the way that this thesis engaged with both feminist literature, and with the Bible and the Christian tradition. My concern was not to revisit, reform, or rescue traditional constructions of eschatology; I thus distinguished my approach from

that of thinkers such as Sarah Coakley, Valerie Karras, Susan Frank Parsons, and Janet Martin Soskice. Instead, I sought to create a new model of the eschatological future on the basis of feminist perspectives on, and some women's experiences of, embodiment. Furthermore, certain doctrines that are connected to eschatology, such as Christology, Incarnation, final judgement, and the *parousia* were not explicitly addressed or utilised. This was out of a concern to speak directly and pointedly to the problems and potentials I detected within the eschatological future. Nevertheless, values reclaimed and upheld by feminist rethinkings of these doctrines, such as eros, dunamis, interconnectivity, and divine-creation indwelling, were seen to be beneficial and were thus made central in my constructions.

Along these lines, the values of relationality, fluidity, and tactility were seen to be elements of all existences and to be more life-affirming than traits that have been assigned with male bodies. Their exclusive assignation to female bodies, though, meant that an appreciation of ways in which some women have experienced these was necessary, in order to further remedy the devaluation of such experiences. I have attempted to read these particular experiences as being indicative of the ways in which all bodies can be honoured for their capacity to reveal both the nature of eschatological existences and also some ways in which those eschatological existences may be shaped and created in the present. In this way, I have suggested that our bodies can be *prophetic* bodies; capable of saying something meaningful about, and realising the possibility of, eschatological existences. Their power and authority to do so was located in both the affirmation of our bodies as our very selves, and in the assertion that God takes such bodies seriously and is endlessly loving and loyal towards them.

This is not to say, however, that I have presented certain women's experiences of their bodies as providing a singular or exclusive image of the future. Instead, I have claimed

that attending to particular qualities assigned to women's bodies, and some women's experiences of these, can reveal some features of eschatological life that have been largely ignored or devalued, or even made entirely absent from the eschaton. In so doing, I proposed a "modest universal" (Mount Shoop, 2010, 26) comprised of particular experiences of embodiment. We remember, though, that this was not used to suggest that one experience speaks a universal truth concerning all existences. Indeed, I have appreciated that women, and indeed all of creation, experience their bodies in a cacophony of different ways. Accordingly, I have not avoided difficult, or even non-experiences, of these qualities but rather engaged with them and valued their equal capacity to speak truths about the eschaton. Each of these experiences, and the many more that are not named here, have been presented as experiences that can assist us in radically rethinking the eschaton in such a way that it becomes dynamic and enlivened, both in terms of the future it anticipates and the life it helps us to live now. As such, I have challenged both the alienated universals of patriarchal theology and also the agnosticism of some feminist theologians by acknowledging that whilst the experiences I have attended to cannot say everything, they can and should be valued and explored for their capacities to say something of meaning and import about the eschatological future.

Although Letty Russell was seen to be one who advocated an acceptance of a "poverty of knowledge about our future" (1979a, 53), I also found in her work a helpful tool with which to speak specifically about the future. Pertaining primarily to Chapter Three but infusing many of my constructive efforts, I engaged in a process of affirmation and contradiction, whereby the affirmation of traits aligned with female bodies qualified the contradiction of anything that hindered this. I claimed that eschatology helps these affirmations and contradictions to move towards constructions which not only add weight to their claims but also enable the envisioning of a future wherein that which

was affirmed and that which was contradicted will be transformed in the newness and dynamism of the eschaton. Such constructive efforts were said to be cyclical insomuch as they were shaped by qualities associated with present bodies, and women's bodies in particular, and returned to these bodies to both inform how we may live in the present and also to specify how such living can shape the future we hope for.[164]

Relationality

In engaging with feminist theological critiques of eschatology, I observed that divine-creation relations were understood to be hindered by traditional constructions of eschatological finality. Noting that the responses subsequently prioritised the nature and function of divine-creation relations in the present, I posed an appreciation of the reasons for this whilst also arguing that God's relations with creation had not been, but could be used to significantly rethink eschatology. I framed my constructive response firstly in terms of the process of eschatology, as this was understood to underpin claims made concerning the content and the time of the eschaton. Building on feminist reconstructions of divine relationality as erotic, that is, powerful in the ways that it is felt and shared between God and creation, I argued that such power need not be averse to a God who can exercise a power that helps us to realise the eschaton. This power too was presented as relational, as it signified the authenticity and intensity of God feeling with and responding to creation.

Reading some framings and experiences of maternal bodies as informative and prophetic, I argued that they can express relational presence as a deliberate and practical perception of and response to the needs and experiences of creation. Given this embodied and tactile perception and response, I affirmed the particularity of

[164] This further illustrates how my thesis harmonises feminist approaches with a sense of eschatological finality, for the methodological process is cyclical even as it speaks of something ultimate.

relationality and used this to claim that the eschaton must, accordingly, be characterised by God's spacious embrace which is open both to the diversity of experiences and existences, and also to the actions and effects of creation. As such, it was claimed that a relational eschaton is one wherein God honours creaturely freedom by opening Godself and the eschaton to being authentically affected by creation, for good or for ill.

However, I also claimed that a God who loves creation to the degree that God fully feels and desires relations with them must also be a God who is pained by anything that compromises this. Having built a case for God's ability to be both transcendent and immanent, both with and for creation, I proposed that God's love for creation is co-existent with God's loyalty to creation. Subsequently, and consistently throughout my thesis, I argued that God can and will contradict anything that hinders the full experience of embodied relations; namely pain, suffering, and death. This, coupled with the relational reading of freedom offered by Russell, which claims that "none of us is completely free until all are free" (1982a, 92), led me to claim that true freedom is only possible when all of creation are helped by God, are tangibly caressed by God, to fully feel unhindered relations that are abundantly dynamic in their embodiments. Individual choices, actions, and experiences were honoured by claiming that they are crucial to realising the process of the eschaton and, furthermore, that they significantly and lastingly affect God, creation, and the eschaton. Still, this was measured with a hope that pains will not endure, deaths will not obtain, and refusals will be transformed by the relentless relational love and loyalty of God. In summary, this rethinking of eschatology on the basis of relationality posited that a God who is as relational as feminist theologians have claimed would similarly be a God who desires, intends, and helps that relationality to be experienced in its fullest and most resplendent capacity.

Fluidity

My purpose in moving on to an appreciation of fluidity and an exploration of its place in the eschaton shared a similar reasoning to my appraisal of relationality. It was noted that feminist theologians attributed worth to the seasonality and temporality of changing embodiments but rarely perceived the possibility of such changes not only enduring but abounding in the eschatological future. I argued that such an omission failed to be of benefit to those whom rarely or never experience embodied life in these creative and efficacious ways. Alongside this, and buttressed by my affirmation of a relational God, I claimed that if God is truly to be the relational God who intensely feels and responds to our joys and pains, and loves and is loyal to our embodied existences, then there must be an alternative future wherein bodies can abound with dynamism. Thus, I attempted both to affirm the feminist theological challenges to a disembodied, static eschaton and to invite feminist theologians to not therefore reject eschatology but rather to rethink it in relation to those characteristics they have successfully revalued.[165]

Accordingly, I posited a reconstruction of the content of eschatology on the basis of framings and some women's experiences of their bodies as changing and fluid. As with maternity, but wider in its scope here, I valued such bodies as being powerful and prophetic in enabling this rethinking. I sought to affirm embodied changes by arguing for their simultaneous endurance and transformation in the eschaton. In short, change was said to endure within the dynamism of transformed eschatological bodies. Speaking of endurance was deemed to be important in order that particular identities and experiences were honoured and not lost in the eschaton. Transformation likewise honoured these particularities but also allowed me to speak of them being experienced

[165] My response here confirmed the claims made in my Introduction; that is, if we are to be effective in our challenges to and our moves away from patriarchal theology, we must not only offer new affirmations and contradictions but also specific constructions based on qualities associated with female bodies, and some women's experiences of these qualities.

in novel and surprising ways. An integral aspect of this novelty was the contradiction of death through its eschatological transformation in and with the lifeful embrace of God. Instead of seeing change as synonymous with death, I claimed that change typifies life and as such can unproblematically endure in the eschaton, albeit in the transformed manner I have noted. Furthermore, this allowed me to return to present concerns and outline how the eschatological contradiction of death can assist us in challenging death-dealing notions, actions, and experiences in the here and now.[166] Dynamic relational embodiments were seen not only to typify but also to teem in the eschaton in such a way that both affirmed and informed the way these embodiments are lived now.

Tactility

In the ways noted above, my reconstructions of eschatology are significantly different from traditional approaches as they are not severed from the concerns and existences of present embodied lives. Instead, my remodelling has shown how eschatology can be thought of as being considerably and indispensably touched by present lives and can, in turn, significantly touch them.[167] Continuing with this conviction, and also with the informative role that feminist perspectives have played in my thesis, I moved to consider how such an eschatology can touch the present through the practice of "good" and loving touch. I acknowledge that such a practise can be cultivated without recourse to the eschaton, but I argued that the eschaton can provide a specific way for us to practise such tactile relating with our own and each other's bodies.[168] Such specificity was presented with reference to practising a tactile embrace and caress,

[166] One aspect of this was considering how we can mourn for bodies who have ceased to exist in a way that honours embodiment; a practice that was further elucidated in Chapter Four.
[167] As noted in Chapter Four, touching here can relate both to being affected by creation (that is, to being changing, fluid beings), and to feeling creation (that is, relating to one another, to ourselves, and to God). Thus, the attention to tactility, in addition to being a vital aspect of embodied relations, also synthesises my previous chapters' claims.
[168] This was seen to further address models of God as distant and domineering as it emphasised the relationality of the eschatological process and the significance of how we exist and what we do within that process.

which was understood to bear the capacity to communicate the universality of the eschaton; to create (however partially) the dynamic and diverse new lives that typify the eschaton; and to challenge difficult experiences of embodiment which are contradicted in the eschaton. Making space was also deemed to be important here. Just as time was said to be needed in realising the process of the eschaton and the transformation of particular embodiments, so too was the time of creating space for the other and oneself affirmed as an appropriate practise. This approach allowed me to appreciate and negotiate some ways in which we can respond both to abusive bodies and to bodies hurt by abuse, through cultivating tactile practises of forgiveness and self-love. This was buttressed by a conviction that God in the eschaton offers the ultimate affirmation and embrace of all bodies, such that when our moves to lovingly touch ourselves and each other fail, we are heartened by the promise that God's loving touch will not.

## Moving Forward

### Implications and Further Research

Whilst my thesis has engaged in a thorough reconstruction of eschatology on the basis of qualities associated with female bodies, and some women's experiences of these, there are certain areas which I feel bear the capacity for further exploration and inspire my perception of and desire for potential further research. These pertain both to some implications of the research conducted in this thesis which I feel may be mined for further significance and relevance, and also to areas not covered here that would benefit from greater exploration. Within my constructive chapters, there were certain facets that I have purposefully chosen not to explore in greater depth. Numerous arguments came to light over the course of my research, and my omission of them does not signify a lack of appreciation but rather an awareness of and commitment to the

intended trajectory of my own response. I note them here in order to further qualify the focus of my response and to consider some potential avenues for further research.

In relation to discussions of embodied change and fluidity in the eschaton, scientific and philosophical thought on entropy theory and the "arrow of time" engaged my interest for their understandings of order and disorder, and the realities of these both in present existence and in anticipations of the cosmological future (see Davies, 2003, 72-92). Despite this interest, my concern in this thesis was neither rooted in nor directed to scientific formulas about time and the future. Rather I sought to challenge concepts that remove God and the eschaton from the material realities of present life, on account of the problematic implications of this for relationality and embodiment. It may be possible, however, to connect these two areas in future research, perhaps exploring whether disorder is inherent in life, and what this may mean for future eschatological life. This was partially explored in Chapter Three as I sought to negotiate and affirm the presence of fluidity and flux in the future. Moves have been made along a more scientific (though no less theological and philosophical) line by thinkers such as Catherine Keller in her appraisal of a "chaosmic Christ" and chaotic creation (2003a, 19). Keller's appreciation of chaos is more substantial than my own, but this is in accordance with my own desire to suggest the possibility of a specific type of future existence, rather than a future that is entirely and eternally undetermined and indeterminable. Still, assessing further whether not only change but chaotic change can and should feature in the eschaton, and how this may be possible, would be an interesting step in further specifying the nature of eschatological life.

This draws me to the second aspect that I chose not to fully explore here; that of the creation of the world. This may seem an odd choice, as doctrines of creation and eschatology both seem to suffer equally, albeit differently, under patriarchal theological

constructions. Catherine Keller, again, has simultaneously devoted time to challenging inaccurate and unhelpful accounts of both creation (in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, 2003a) and apocalypse (in *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World,* 1996a). Thus paying attention to both seems a conjoined and mutually-important pursuit. However, I have consistently acknowledged and developed my agreement with Letty Russell throughout this response; that is, I have utilised a hermeneutical approach to existence that *begins* with the *end*. Whilst I have clearly aligned my own thoughts with many of those noted, and certainly appreciate the need to reconfigure the meaning and significance of the *past*, I deemed the need to reconsider and reconstruct the future to be more substantially neglected by feminist theologians, and thus presented it as a more pertinent need. Having said this, an appreciation of beginnings is not absent in my thesis: the beginning that we all have in a female body, and the new beginning that is facilitated by the eschatological future, are both key aspects of my response. Whilst I did not substantially explore dimensions of the origins of cosmological creation, then, I displayed a consistent appreciation of embodied and eschatological creation. Still, it would be interesting to examine whether a reconstruction of the eschaton can offer anything of benefit to feminist theologians' engagements with considerations of creation, and also whether rethinking creation may further assist reconfigurations of the eschatological future.

Still, more qualification is needed to account for my divergence from more cosmological perspectives. Many such perspectives cast a much more macroscopic lens over creation than I have done here. This means, somewhat paradoxically, that they often attend to the existence and meaning of even the most microscopic members of creation; that is, they explicitly affirm and value "all species of flora and fauna", seeing God as finding "the entire, intricate evolutionary complex infinitely precious and wondrous" (McFague, 1997, 135). Far from denying this, my response has shown a

similar appreciation and has suggested some ways in which a revaluation of the earth may be achieved. My concern has, however, predominantly been with challenging and revaluing the ways in which patriarchal theology has framed *female* bodies. Within this it has been assumed, to paraphrase Anne Primavesi, that what is claimed for women will be claimed for nature also (1991, 143). Thus, where explicit reference to the earth is lacking, the inference is made by reference to female bodies on account of their traditional association and simultaneous defamation. It is, however, helpful to alter Primavesi's sentiment slightly in order to allow more space for particularity. Whilst speaking affirmatively of female bodies in conjunction with the earth body can remedy the devaluation of both, I have here claimed that this should be expanded to appreciating the changing and fluid natures of *all bodies*, in conjunction with the earth body. We should note, though, that just as experiences of change and fluidity differ amongst human bodies, so too are change and fluidity manifest differently in the earth body. Furthermore, what is claimed for bodies may be inapplicable to the earth body; speaking of self-love, for example, is appropriate and necessary in relation to human bodies, and female bodies in particular, but may make little sense when considering how to cultivate the affirmation, appreciation, and flourishing of a flower or a tree. That these differences have not been explored here is largely due to my particular concern for revaluing female bodies; however, the specific impact that an embodied eschatology can have for the earth is another avenue that would benefit from further investigation. I believe that my efforts in this thesis may provide a useful starting point to explore such questions.

The last dimension of thought that I consciously chose not to develop more thoroughly was philosophical considerations of the meaning of otherness. This pertains to my suggestions for the realisation of a relationally embodied eschatological existence in Chapter Four. Rather than exploring the theoretical meaning of otherness, this chapter

was concerned with constructing a practical model for relating to others.[169] Here, I intended to explore relational values that were both beneficial to practising the creation and anticipation of the eschatological future in the present, and also underdeveloped or overlooked in relation to the eschaton. The omission of a philosophical discussion of otherness was thus purposeful; I intended to focus on the practicality of relating to others and the reality of relationships with others whom we love and also who hurt us.[170] Thus, whilst questions of who the other is and, indeed, who the self is in such relating are significant and were acknowledged in Chapter Four, a substantial philosophical discussion of otherness would have distracted from my desire to speak practically and realistically of the ways in which my reconstruction of eschatology can both inform and be informed by present lives.

In addition to the areas noted above that could potentially birth interesting avenues into further research, I feel that birthing itself may also hold even more potential than it has evidently shown in my thesis. Indeed, I have argued that eschatological endings signify new beginnings, and this is also the hope I hold for my research. Whilst there are certainly areas of thought in my thesis that could have been developed but have not, for reasons noted, I feel that the appraisal of some experiences of motherhood, and the appreciation of the interpretive significance of its practical complexities and potentials can be yet more beneficial to theology. Experiences of birthing, motherhood, and the various other experiences of embodiment that are located on these spectrums

[169] I previously explored the notion of otherness in my Master's thesis, entitled *Journeying through Otherness: Exploring Understandings of Otherness in Relation to Love of Neighbour, Enemy, Self, and God* (2010). Here, I attended to the perspectives of Buber, Sartre, and Levinas (among others). This provided a basis for my considerations in Chapter Four, as my Master's thesis sought to develop a model for relating lovingly to others that appreciated the alterity of the other and the potential for harm in relationships with others.

[170] This is not to suggest that philosophical concerns are necessarily severed from practice; indeed, Hadot notes that historically, philosophy was concerned with "a style of life and a mode of being" (2002, 240) whilst Bonsor argues that philosophy is intrinsic to "the practice of theology" (1993, 3). Whilst certainly not true of all modes of philosophical enquiry, these examples speak to the ways in which my constructive theories in Chapters Two and Three are intrinsically linked to my considerations of practise in Chapter Four.

may, I feel, prove to have wider possibilities for application; wider than indicated here and wider than are acknowledged in the theological sphere. I would be interested in exploring, and engaging with others who have explored, whether the diverse ways in which some women experience their bodies as birthing bodies (both literally and metaphorically) have merits for thinking differently about other areas of theology and doctrine, as they have with eschatology. Whilst the multiplicity and intricacy of these experiences means that a comprehensive exploration of them may forever be elusive, it is precisely because of their multiplicity and intricacy that I feel they hold such power and significance.

I have also been encouraged and inspired by the rethinking of touch that those named in Chapter Four have engaged in, and that has emerged as crucial to my reconstruction of the practical significance of eschatology. I noted that attending to and affirming the sensuousness and tactility of embodied relations has long been neglected and trivialised in theology, primarily because of its association with female bodies. As such, whilst I have begun to appreciate the creative, communicative, and hopeful capacity of good and loving touch here, I have also been inspired by this to ponder its significance further. I feel that the practice of touch I have presented here signifies a powerful and novel way to rethink the place of eschatology in negotiating and informing our relations with one another, and I would be interested in exploring more comprehensively the justifications for, and dimensions and implications of, bodies who strive to be in touch with themselves and with one another.

Lastly, and inspired by the evident relational and interpretive power of particular and diverse bodies that has consistently been upheld in both feminist theology and this thesis, I am interested in further exploring the location of bodies in theology. Similarly influenced by the practical focus of my final chapter, I would like to engage not only

with thinking about bodies but also with practically exploring how bodies can be embraced and engaged with in the doing of theology. I have also been encouraged to think in this direction by some recent engagements with the use of dance in theology. Henriëtte Beurmanjer, for instance, engages in a practice entitled *Bibliodance*, wherein dance is used as a form of "spiritual learning" which engages the Bible, the dancer, and the Divine (2013), whilst Amy Wright Glenn (2013, 8) presents a theology of dance as something that is powerfully therapeutic. Citing her engagement with Hari Krishna worship services, she writes:

> Watching bodies express the heart's deepest longing for communion changed me. One could dance and pray at the same time? Prayer merged with music. I danced sadness, strength, friendship, peace, and joy. As the Muslim mystic Rumi wrote, 'He who knoweth the dance; dwelleth in God'.

I feel that reflecting on the many creative and expressive ways we live and relate as embodied beings would be an exciting and illuminating avenue for future research, and one that could further add "flesh to the bones" of what it means to theologise as beings who are embedded in our embodiments.

## Conclusion

My attempts to reconstruct eschatology in a way that is firmly rooted in framings and experiences of female bodies has signified a novel and necessary contribution to both traditional eschatological thought and feminist theological critiques of such thought. I have sought to challenge the patriarchal, androcentric, and dislocated models of eschatology provided by the Christian tradition by revaluing female bodies. This has meant affirming qualities assigned to all and experienced by some women, and naming them as inseparable from and crucial to all of creation's existences both now and, particularly, in the eschatological future. In so doing, I have also attempted to provide a model of eschatology for feminist theology which celebrates and hopes for all of our bodies, in order to show that the ultimacy of the eschaton need not be averse to feminist theological concerns but can, in fact, affirm them. I have also envisioned a

transformed existence in the eschaton whereby those aspects of existence that have been so valued are brought to their fullest fruition. Thus, relationality, fluidity, and tactility are afforded additional and specific affirmations, and in such a way that speaks back to the present and helps us to live in ways that are more fully embedded in our relational, dynamic, and sensuous embodiments. My research has solidified my conviction that theology must reconsider and reconfigure its doctrines in light of, and no longer in spite of, experiences of embodiment. Theology is all the more rich and relevant when it does so. Only then can the house that we build truly be one of open embrace that makes space for and celebrates the fluid and tangible bodies to whom we relate and who we, indeed, are.

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